THE WORLD'S BEST ONE HUNDRED DETECTIVE STORIES

(IN TEN VOLUMES)

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THE WORLD'S BEST 100 DETECTIVE STORIES

ANNA KATHARINE GREEN ROHLFS

MISSING: PAGE THIRTEEN

I

"ONE more! just one more well paying affair, and I promise to stop; really and truly to stop."

"But, Puss, why one more? You have earned the amount you set for yourself,—or very nearly,—and though my help is not great, in three months I can add enough——"

"No, you cannot, Arthur. You are doing well; I appreciate it; in fact, I am just delighted to have you work for me in the way you do, but you cannot, in your present position, make enough in three months, or in six, to meet the situation as I see it. Enough does not satisfy me. The measure must be full, heaped up, and running over. Possible failure following promise must be provided for. Never must I feel myself called upon to do this kind of thing again. Besides, I have never got over the Zabriskie tragedy. It haunts me continually. Something new may help to put it out of my head. I feel guilty. I was responsible——"

"No, Puss. I will not have it that you were responsible. Some such end was bound to follow a complication like that. Sooner or later he would have been driven to shoot himself——"

(From "The Golden Slipper," by Anna Katharine Green. Copyright, 1915, by Anna K. Rohlfs.

"But not her."

"No, not her. But do you think she would have given those few minutes of perfect understanding with her blind husband for a few years more of miserable life?"

Violet made no answer; she was too absorbed in her surprise. Was this Arthur? Had a few weeks' work and a close connection with the really serious things of life made this change in him? Her face beamed at the thought, which seeing, but not understanding what underlay this evidence of joy, he bent and kissed her, saying with some of his old nonchalance:

"Forget it, Violet; only don't let any one or anything lead you to interest yourself in another affair of the kind. If you do, I shall have to consult a certain friend of yours as to the best way of stopping this folly. I mention no names. Oh! you need not look so frightened. Only behave; that's all."

"He's right," she acknowledged to herself, as he sauntered away; "altogether right."

Yet because she wanted the extra money——

. . . . . .

The scene invited alarm,—that is, for so young a girl as Violet, surveying it from an automobile some time after the stroke of midnight. An unknown house at the end of a heavily shaded walk, in the open doorway of which could be seen the silhouette of a woman's form leaning eagerly forward with arms outstretched in an appeal for help. It vanished while she looked, but the effect remained, holding her to her seat for one startled moment. This seemed strange, for she had anticipated adventure. One is not summoned from a private ball to ride a dozen miles into the country on an errand of investigation, without some expectation of encountering the mysterious and the tragic. But Violet Strange, for all her many experiences, was of a most susceptible nature, and for the instant in which that door stood open, with only the memory of that expectant figure to disturb the faintly lit vista of the hall beyond, she felt that grip upon the

throat which comes from an indefinable fear which no words can explain and no plummet sound.

But this soon passed. With the setting of her foot to ground, conditions changed and her emotions took on a more normal character. The figure of a man now stood in the place held by the vanished woman, and it was not only that of one she knew but that of one whom she trusted—a friend whose very presence gave her courage. With this recognition came a better understanding of the situation, and it was with a beaming eye and unclouded features that she tripped up the walk to meet the expectant figure and outstretched hand of Roger Upjohn.

"You here!" she exclaimed, amid smiles and blushes, as he drew her into the hall.

He at once launched forth into explanations mingled with apologies for the presumption he had shown in putting her to this inconvenience. There was trouble in the house—great trouble. Something had occurred for which an explanation must be found before morning, or the happiness and honour of more than one person now under this unhappy roof would be wrecked. He knew it was late—that she had been obliged to take a long and dreary ride alone, but her success with the problem which had once come near wrecking his own life had emboldened him to telephone to the office and— "But you are in ball-dress," he cried in amazement. "Did you think——"

"I came from a ball. Word reached me between the dances. I did not go home. I had been bidden to hurry."

He looked his appreciation, but when he spoke it was to say:

"This is the situation. Miss Digby——"

"The lady who is to be married to-morrow?"

"Who *hopes* to be married to-morrow."

"How, *hopes?*"

"Who *will* be married to-morrow, if a certain article lost in this house to-night can be found before any of the persons who have been dining here leave for their homes."

Violet uttered an exclamation.

"Then, Mr. Cornell," she began——

"Mr. Cornell has our utmost confidence," Roger hastened to interpose. "But the article missing is one which he might reasonably desire to possess and which he alone of all present had the opportunity of securing. You can therefore see why he, with his pride—the pride of a man not rich, engaged to marry a woman who is—should declare that unless his innocence is established before daybreak, the doors of St. Bartholomew will remain shut to-morrow."

"But the article lost—what is it?"

"Miss Digby will give you the particulars. She is waiting to receive you," he added with a gesture towards a half-open door at their right.

Violet glanced that way, then cast her looks up and down the hall in which they stood.

"Do you know that you have not told me in whose house I am? Not hers, I know. She lives in the city."

"And you are twelve miles from Harlem. Miss Strange, you are in the Van Broecklyn mansion, famous enough you will acknowledge. Have you never been here before?"

"I have been by here, but I recognized nothing in the dark. What an exciting place for an investigation!"

"And Mr. Van Broecklyn? Have you never met him?"

"Once, when a child. He frightened me *then.*"

"And may frighten you now; though I doubt it. Time has mellowed him. Besides, I have prepared him for what might otherwise occasion him some astonishment. Naturally he would not look just for the sort of lady investigator I am about to introduce to him."

She smiled. Violet Strange was a very charming young woman, as well as a keen prober of odd mysteries.

The meeting between herself and Miss Digby was a sympathetic one. After the first inevitable shock which the latter felt at sight of the beauty and fashionable appearance of the mysterious little being who was to solve her difficulties, her glance, which, under other circumstances, might have lingered unduly upon the piquant features

and exquisite dressing of the fairy-like figure before her, passed at once to Violet's eyes in whose steady depths beamed an intelligence quite at odds with the coquettish dimples which so often misled the casual observer in his estimation of a character singularly subtle and well-poised.

As for the impression she herself made upon Violet, it was the same she made upon everyone. No one could look long at Florence Digby and not recognize the loftiness of her spirit and the generous nature of her impulses. In person she was tall, and as she leaned to take Violet's hand, the difference between them brought out the salient points in each, to the great admiration of the one onlooker.

Meantime, for all her interest in the case in hand, Violet could not help casting a hurried look about her, in gratification of the curiosity incited by her entrance into a house signalized from its foundation by such a series of tragic events. The result was disappointing. The walls were plain, the furniture simple. Nothing suggestive in either, unless it was the fact that nothing was new, nothing modern. As it looked in the days of Burr and Hamilton so it looked to-day, even to the rather startling detail of candles which did duty on every side in place of gas.

As Violet recalled the reason for this, the fascination of the past seized upon her imagination. There was no knowing where this might have carried her, had not the feverish gleam in Miss Digby's eyes warned her that the present held its own excitement. Instantly, she was all attention and listening with undivided mind to that lady's disclosures.

They were brief and to the following effect:

The dinner which had brought some half-dozen people together in this house had been given in celebration of her impending marriage. But it was also in a way meant as a compliment to one of the other guests, a Mr. Spielhagen, who, during the week, had succeeded in demonstrating to a few experts the value of a discovery he had made which would transform a great industry.

In speaking of this discovery, Miss Digby did not go into particulars, the whole matter being far beyond her understanding; but in stating its value she openly acknowledged that it was in the line of Mr. Cornell's own work, and one which involved calculations and a formula which, if prematurely disclosed, would invalidate the contract Mr. Spielhagen hoped to make, and thus destroy his present hopes.

Of this formula but two copies existed. One was locked up in a safe deposit vault in Boston, the other he had brought into the house on his person, and it was the latter which was now missing, it having been abstracted during the evening from a manuscript of sixteen or more sheets, under circumstances which she would now endeavour to relate.

Mr. Van Broecklyn, their host, had in his melancholy life but one interest which could be called at all absorbing. This was for explosives. As a consequence, much of the talk at the dinner-table had been on Mr. Spielhagen's discovery, and the possible changes it might introduce into this especial industry. As these, worked out from a formula kept secret from the trade, could not but affect greatly Mr. Cornell's interests, she found herself listening intently, when Mr. Van Broecklyn, with an apology for his interference, ventured to remark that if Mr. Spielhagen had made a valuable discovery in this line, so had he, and one which he had substantiated by many experiments. It was not a marketable one, such as Mr. Spielhagen's was, but in his work upon the same, and in the tests which he had been led to make, he had discovered certain instances he would gladly name, which demanded exceptional procedure to be successful. If Mr. Spielhagen's method did not allow for these exceptions, nor make suitable provision for them, then Mr. Spielhagen's method would fail more times than it would succeed. Did it so allow and so provide? It would relieve him greatly to learn that it did.

The answer came quickly. Yes, it did. But later and after some further conversation, Mr. Spielhagen's confidence

seemed to wane, and before they left the dinner-table, he openly declared his intention of looking over his manuscript again that very night, in order to be sure that the formula therein contained duly covered all the exceptions mentioned by Mr. Van Broecklyn.

If Mr. Cornell's countenance showed any change at this moment, she for one had not noticed it; but the bitterness with which he remarked upon the other's good fortune in having discovered this formula of whose entire success he had no doubt, was apparent to everybody, and naturally gave point to the circumstances which a short time afterward associated him with the disappearance of the same.

The ladies (there were two others besides herself) having withdrawn in a body to the music-room, the gentlemen all proceeded to the library to smoke. Here, conversation loosed from the one topic which had hitherto engrossed it, was proceeding briskly, when Mr. Spielhagen, with a nervous gesture, impulsively looked about him and said:

"I cannot rest till I have run through my thesis again. Where can I find a quiet spot? I won't be long; I read very rapidly."

It was for Mr. Van Broecklyn to answer, but no word coming from him, every eye turned his way, only to find him sunk in one of those fits of abstraction so well known to his friends, and from which no one who has this strange man's peace of mind at heart ever presumes to rouse him.

What was to be done? These moods of their singular host sometimes lasted half an hour, and Mr. Spielhagen had not the appearance of a man of patience. Indeed he presently gave proof of the great uneasiness he was labouring under, for noticing a door standing ajar on the other side of the room, he remarked to those around him:

"A den! and lighted! Do you see any objection to my shutting myself in there for a few minutes?"

No one venturing to reply, he rose, and giving a slight

push to the door, disclosed a small room exquisitely panelled and brightly lighted, but without one article of furniture in it, not even a chair.

"The very place," quoth Mr. Spielhagen, and lifting a light cane-bottomed chair from the many standing about, he carried it inside and shut the door behind him.

Several minutes passed during which the man who had served at table entered with a tray on which were several small glasses evidently containing some choice liqueur. Finding his master fixed in one of his strange moods, he set the tray down and, pointing to one of the glasses, said:

"That is for Mr. Van Broecklyn. It contains his usual quieting powder." And urging the gentlemen to help themselves, he quietly left the room.

Mr. Upjohn lifted the glass nearest him, and Mr. Cornell seemed about to do the same when he suddenly reached forward and catching up one farther off started for the room in which Mr. Spielhagen had so deliberately secluded himself.

Why he did all this—why, above all things, he should reach across the tray for a glass instead of taking the one under his hand, he can no more explain than why he has followed many another unhappy impulse. Nor did he understand the nervous start given by Mr. Spielhagen at his entrance, or the stare with which that gentleman took the glass from his hand and mechanically drank its contents, till he saw how his hand had stretched itself across the sheet of paper he was reading, in an open attempt to hide the lines visible between his fingers. Then indeed the intruder flushed and withdrew in great embarrassment, fully conscious of his indiscretion but not deeply disturbed till Mr. Van Broecklyn, suddenly arousing and glancing down at the tray placed very near his hand, remarked in some surprise: "Dobbs seems to have forgotten me." Then indeed, the unfortunate Mr. Cornell realized what he had done. It was the glass intended for his host which he had caught up and carried into the other room—the glass which he had been told contained a

drug. Of what folly he had been guilty, and how tame would be any effort at excuse!

Attempting none, he rose and with a hurried glance at Mr. Upjohn who flushed in sympathy at his distress, he crossed to the door he had so lately closed upon Mr. Spielhagen. But feeling his shoulder touched as his hand pressed the knob, he turned to meet the eye of Mr. Van Broecklyn fixed upon him with an expression which utterly confounded him.

"Where are you going?" that gentleman asked.

The questioning tone, the severe look, expressive at once of displeasure and astonishment, were most disconcerting, but Mr. Cornell managed to stammer forth:

"Mr. Spielhagen is in here consulting his thesis. When your man brought in the cordial, I was awkward enough to catch up your glass and carry it in to Mr. Spielhagen. He drank it and I—I am anxious to see if it did him any harm."

As he uttered the last word he felt Mr. Van Broecklyn's hand slip from his shoulder, but no word accompanied the action, nor did his host make the least move to follow him into the room.

This was a matter of great regret to him later, as it left him for a moment out of the range of every eye, during which he says he simply stood in a state of shock at seeing Mr. Spielhagen still sitting there, manuscript in hand, but with head fallen forward and eyes closed; dead, asleep or—he hardly knew what; the sight so paralysed him.

Whether or not this was the exact truth and the whole truth, Mr. Cornell certainly looked very unlike himself as he stepped back into Mr. Van Broecklyn's presence; and he was only partially reassured when that gentleman protested that there was no real harm in the drug, and that Mr. Spielhagen would be all right if left to wake naturally and without shock. However, as his present attitude was one of great discomfort, they decided to carry him back and lay him on the library lounge. But before doing this, Mr. Upjohn drew from his flaccid grasp, the precious

manuscript, and carrying it into the larger room placed it on a remote table, where it remained undisturbed till Mr. Spielhagen, suddenly coming to himself at the end of some fifteen minutes, missed the sheets from his hand, and bounding up, crossed the room to repossess himself of them.

His face, as he lifted them up and rapidly ran through them with ever-accumulating anxiety, told them what they had to expect.

The page containing the formula was gone!

. . . . . .

Violet now saw her problem.

II

There was no doubt about the loss I have mentioned; all could see that page 13 was not there. In vain a second handling of every sheet, the one so numbered was not to be found. Page 14 met the eye on the top of the pile, and page 12 finished it off at the bottom, but no page 13 in between, or anywhere else.

Where had it vanished, and through whose agency had this misadventure occurred? No one could say, or, at least, no one there made any attempt to do so, though everybody started to look for it.

But where look? The adjoining small room offered no facilities for hiding a cigar-end, much less a square of shining white paper. Bare walls, a bare floor, and a single chair for furniture, comprised all that was to be seen in this direction. Nor could the room in which they then stood be thought to hold it, unless it was on the person of some one of them. Could this be the explanation of the mystery? No man looked his doubts; but Mr. Cornell, possibly divining the general feeling, stepped up to Mr. Van Broecklyn and in a cool voice, but with the red burning hotly on either cheek, said, so as to be heard by everyone present:

"I demand to be searched—at once and thoroughly."

A moment's silence, then the common cry:

"We will all be searched."

"Is Mr. Spielhagen sure that the missing page was with the others when he sat down in the adjoining room to read his thesis?" asked their perturbed host.

"Very sure," came the emphatic reply. "Indeed, I was just going through the formula itself when I fell asleep."

"You are ready to assert this?"

"I am ready to swear it."

Mr. Cornell repeated his request.

"I demand that you make a thorough search of my person. I must be cleared, and instantly, of every suspicion," he gravely asserted, "or how can I marry Miss Digby to-morrow."

After that there was no further hesitation. One and all subjected themselves to the ordeal suggested; even Mr. Spielhagen. But this effort was as futile as the rest. The lost page was not found.

What were they to think? What were they to do?

There seemed to be nothing left to do, and yet some further attempt must be made towards the recovery of this important formula. Mr. Cornell's marriage and Mr. Spielhagen's business success both depended upon its being in the latter's hands before six in the morning, when he was engaged to hand it over to a certain manufacturer sailing for Europe on an early steamer.

Five hours!

Had Mr. Van Broecklyn a suggestion to offer? No, he was as much at sea as the rest.

Simultaneously look crossed look. Blankness was on every face.

"Let us call the ladies," suggested one.

It was done, and however great the tension had been before, it was even greater when Miss Digby stepped upon the scene. But she was not a woman to be shaken from her poise even by a crisis of this importance. When the dilemma had been presented to her and the full situa-

tion grasped, she looked first at Mr. Cornell and then at Mr. Spielhagen, and quietly said:

"There is but one explanation possible of this matter. Mr. Spielhagen will excuse me, but he is evidently mistaken in thinking that he saw the lost page among the rest. The condition into which he was thrown by the unaccustomed drug he had drank, made him liable to hallucinations. I have not the least doubt he thought he had been studying the formula at the time he dropped off to sleep. I have every confidence in the gentleman's candour. But so have I in that of Mr. Cornell," she supplemented, with a smile.

An exclamation from Mr. Van Broecklyn and a subdued murmur from all but Mr. Spielhagen testified to the effect of this suggestion, and there is no saying what might have been the result if Mr. Cornell had not hurriedly put in this extraordinary and most unexpected protest:

"Miss Digby has my gratitude," said he, "for a confidence which I hope to prove to be deserved. But I must say this for Mr. Spielhagen. He was correct in stating that he was engaged in looking over his formula when I stepped into his presence with the glass of cordial. If you were not in a position to see the hurried way in which his hand instinctively spread itself over the page he was reading, I was; and if that does not seem conclusive to you, then I feel bound to state that in unconsciously following this movement of his, I plainly saw the number written on the top of the page, and that number was—13."

A loud exclamation, this time from Spielhagen himself, announced his gratitude and corresponding change of attitude toward the speaker.

"Wherever that damned page has gone," he protested, advancing towards Cornell with outstretched hand, "you have nothing to do with its disappearance."

Instantly all constraint fled, and every countenance took on a relieved expression. *But the problem remained.*

Suddenly those very words passed some one's lips, and with their utterance Mr. Upjohn remembered how at an

extraordinary crisis in his own life, he had been helped and an equally difficult problem settled, by a little lady secretly attached to a private detective agency. If she could only be found and hurried here before morning, all might yet be well. He would make the effort. Such wild schemes sometimes work. He telephoned to the office and——

Was there anything else Miss Strange would like to know?

III

Miss Strange, thus appealed to, asked where the gentlemen were now.

She was told that they were still all together in the library; the ladies had been sent home.

"Then let us go to them," said Violet, hiding under a smile her great fear that here was an affair which might very easily spell for her that dismal word, *failure*.

So great was that fear that under all ordinary circumstances she would have had no thought for anything else in the short interim between this stating of the problem and her speedy entrance among the persons involved. But the circumstances of this case were so far from ordinary, or rather let me put it in this way, the setting of the case was so very extraordinary, that she scarcely thought of the problem before her, in her great interest in the house through whose rambling halls she was being so carefully guided. So much that was tragic and heart-rending had occurred here. The Van Broecklyn name, the Van Broecklyn history, above all the Van Broecklyn tradition, which made the house unique in the country's annals (of which more hereafter), all made an appeal to her imagination, and centred her thoughts on what she saw about her. There was a door which no man ever opened—had never opened since Revolutionary times—should she see it? Should she know it if she did see it? Then Mr. Van Broecklyn himself! Just to meet him, under any conditions and in any place, was an event. But to meet

him here, under the pall of his own mystery! No wonder she had no words for her companions, or that her thoughts clung to this anticipation in wonder and almost fearsome delight.

His story was a well-known one. A bachelor and a misanthrope, he lived absolutely alone save for a large entourage of servants, all men and elderly ones at that. He never visited. Though he now and then, as on this occasion, entertained certain persons under his roof, he declined every invitation for himself, avoiding even, with equal strictness, all evening amusements of whatever kind, which would detain him in the city after ten at night. Perhaps this was to ensure no break in his rule of life never to sleep out of his own bed. Though he was a man well over fifty he had not spent, according to his own statement, but two nights out of his own bed since his return from Europe in early boyhood, and those were in obedience to a judicial summons which took him to Boston.

This was his main eccentricity, but he had another which is apparent enough from what has already been said. He avoided women. If thrown in with them during his short visits into town, he was invariably polite and at times companionable, but he never sought them out, nor had gossip, contrary to its usual habit, ever linked his name with one of the sex.

Yet he was a man of more than ordinary attraction. His features were fine and his figure impressive. He might have been the cynosure of all eyes had he chosen to enter crowded drawing-rooms, or even to frequent public assemblages, but having turned his back upon everything of the kind in his youth, he had found it impossible to alter his habits with advancing years; nor was he now expected to. The position he had taken was respected. Leonard Van Broecklyn was no longer criticized.

Was there any explanation for this strangely self-centred life? Those who knew him best seemed to think so. In the first place he had sprung from an unfortunate stock. Events of an unusual and tragic nature had

marked the family of both parents. Nor had his parents themselves been exempt from this seeming fatality. Antagonistic in tastes and temperament, they had dragged on an unhappy existence in the old home, till both natures rebelled, and a separation ensued which not only disunited their lives but sent them to opposite sides of the globe never to return again. At least, that was the inference drawn from the peculiar circumstances attending the event. On the morning of one never-to-be-forgotten day, John Van Broecklyn, the grandfather of the present representative of the family, found the following note from his son lying on the library table:

"FATHER:

"Life in this house, or any house, with *her* is no longer endurable. One of us must go. The mother should not be separated from her child. Therefore it is I whom you will never see again. Forget me, but be considerate of her and the boy.

"WILLIAM."

Six hours later another note was found, this time from the wife:

"FATHER:

"Tied to a rotting corpse what does one do? Lop off one's arm if necessary to rid one of the contact. As all love between your son and myself is dead, I can no longer live within the sound of his voice. As this is his home, he is the one to remain in it. May our child reap the benefit of his mother's loss and his father's affection.

"RHODA."

Both were gone, and gone forever. Simultaneous in their departure, they preserved each his own silence and sent no word back. If the one went east and the other west, they may have met on the other side of the globe, but never again in the home which sheltered their boy. For him and for his grandfather they had sunk from sight

in the great sea of humanity, leaving them stranded on an isolated and mournful shore. The grandfather steeled himself to the double loss, for the child's sake; but the boy of eleven succumbed. Few of the world's great sufferers, of whatever age or condition, have mourned as this child mourned, or shown the effects of his grief so deeply or so long. Not till he had passed his majority did the line, carved in one day in his baby forehead, lose any of its intensity; and there are those who declare that even later than that, the midnight stillness of the house was disturbed from time to time by his muffled shriek of "Mother! Mother!" sending the servants from the house, and adding one more horror to the many which clung about this accursed mansion.

Of this cry Violet had heard, and it was that and the door—— But I have already told you about the door which she was still looking for, when her two companions suddenly halted, and she found herself on the threshold of the library, in full view of Mr. Van Broecklyn and his two guests.

Slight and fairy-like in figure, with an air of modest reserve more in keeping with her youth and dainty dimpling beauty than with her errand, her appearance produced an astonishment which none of the gentlemen were able to disguise. This the clever detective, with a genius for social problems and odd elusive cases! This darling of the ball-room in satin and pearls! Mr. Spielhagen glanced at Mr. Carroll, and Mr. Carroll at Mr. Spielhagen, and both at Mr. Upjohn, in very evident distrust. As for Violet, she had eyes only for Mr. Van Broecklyn who stood before her in a surprise equal to that of the others but with more restraint in its expression.

She was not disappointed in him. She had expected to see a man, reserved almost to the point of austerity. And she found his first look even more awe-compelling than her imagination had pictured; so much so indeed, that her resolution faltered, and she took a quick step backward; which seeing, he smiled and her heart and hopes grew warm again. That he could smile, and smile with absolute

sweetness, was her great comfort when later—— But I am introducing you too hurriedly to the catastrophe. There is much to be told first.

I pass over the preliminaries, and come at once to the moment when Violet, having listened to a repetition of the full facts, stood with downcast eyes before these gentlemen, complaining in some alarm to herself:

"They expect me to tell them now and without further search or parley just where this missing page is. I shall have to balk that expectation without losing their confidence. But how?"

Summoning up her courage and meeting each inquiring eye with a look which seemed to carry a different message to each, she remarked very quietly:

"This is not a matter to guess at. I must have time and I must look a little deeper into the facts just given me. I presume that the table I see over there is the one upon which Mr. Upjohn laid the manuscript during Mr. Spielhagen's unconsciousness."

All nodded.

"Is it—I mean the table—in the same condition it was then? Has nothing been taken from it except the manuscript?"

"Nothing."

"Then the missing page is not there," she smiled, pointing to its bare top. A pause, during which she stood with her gaze fixed on the floor before her. She was thinking and thinking hard.

Suddenly she came to a decision. Addressing Mr. Upjohn she asked if he were quite sure that in taking the manuscript from Mr. Spielhagen's hand he had neither disarranged nor dropped one of its pages.

The answer was unequivocal.

"Then," she declared, with quiet assurance and a steady meeting with her own of every eye, "as the thirteenth page was not found among the others when they were taken from this table, nor on the persons of either Mr. Carroll or Mr. Spielhagen, it is still in that inner room."

"Impossible!" came from every lip, each in a different tone. "That room is absolutely empty."

"May I have a look at its emptiness?" she asked, with a naïve glance at Mr. Van Broecklyn.

"There is positively nothing in the room but the chair Mr. Spielhagen sat on," objected that gentleman with a noticeable air of reluctance.

"Still, may I not have a look at it?" she persisted, with that disarming smile she kept for great occasions.

Mr. Van Broecklyn bowed. He could not refuse a request so urged, but his step was slow and his manner next to ungracious as he led the way to the door of the adjoining room and threw it open.

Just what she had been told to expect! Bare walls and floors and an empty chair! Yet she did not instantly withdraw, but stood silently contemplating the panelled wainscoting surrounding her, as though she suspected it of containing some secret hiding-place not apparent to the eye.

Mr. Van Broecklyn, noting this, hastened to say:

"The walls are sound, Miss Strange. They contain no hidden cupboards."

"And that door?" she asked, pointing to a portion of the wainscoting so exactly like the rest that only the most experienced eye could detect the line of deeper colour which marked an opening.

For an instant Mr. Van Broecklyn stood rigid, then the immovable pallor, which was one of his chief characteristics, gave way to a deep flush, as he explained:

"There was a door there once; but it has been permanently closed. With cement," he forced himself to add, his countenance losing its evanescent colour till it shone ghastly again in the strong light.

With difficulty Violet preserved her show of composure. "*The* door!" she murmured to herself. "I have found it. The great historic door!" But her tone was light as she ventured to say:

"Then it can no longer be opened by your hand or any other?"

"It could not be opened with an axe."

Violet sighed in the midst of her triumph. Her curiosity had been satisfied, but the problem she had been set to solve looked inexplicable. But she was not one to yield easily to discouragement. Marking the disappointment approaching to disdain in every eye but Mr. Upjohn's, she drew herself up—(she had not far to draw) and made this final proposal.

"A sheet of paper," she remarked, "of the size of this one cannot be spirited away, or dissolved into thin air. It exists; it is here; and all we want is some happy thought in order to find it. I acknowledge that that happy thought has not come to me yet, but sometimes I get it in what may seem to you a very odd way. Forgetting myself, I try to assume the individuality of the person who has worked the mystery. If I can think with his thoughts, I possibly may follow him in his actions. In this case I should like to make believe for a few moments that I am Mr. Spielhagen" (with what a delicious smile she said this). "I should like to hold his thesis in my hand and be interrupted in my reading by Mr. Cornell offering his glass of cordial; then I should like to nod and slip off mentally into a deep sleep. Possibly in that sleep the dream may come which will clarify the whole situation. Will you humour me so far?"

A ridiculous concession, but finally she had her way; the farce was enacted and they left her as she had requested them to do, alone with her dreams in the small room.

Suddenly they heard her cry out, and in another moment she appeared before them, the picture of excitement.

"Is this chair standing exactly as it did when Mr. Spielhagen occupied it?" she asked.

"No," said Mr. Upjohn, "it faced the other way."

She stepped back and twirled the chair about with her disengaged hand.

"So?"

Mr. Upjohn and Mr. Spielhagen both nodded, so did the others when she glanced at them.

With a sign of ill-concealed satisfaction, she drew their attention to herself; then eagerly cried:

"Gentlemen, look here!"

Seating herself, she allowed her whole body to relax till she presented the picture of one calmly asleep. Then, as they continued to gaze at her with fascinated eyes, not knowing what to expect, they saw something white escape from her lap and slide across the floor till it touched and was stayed by the wainscot. It was the top page of the manuscript she held, and as some inkling of the truth reached their astonished minds, she sprang impetuously to her feet and, pointing to the fallen sheet, cried:

"Do you understand now? Look where it lies, and then look here!"

She had bounded towards the wall and was now on her knees pointing to the bottom of the wainscot, just a few inches to the left of the fallen page.

"A crack!" she cried, "under what was once the door. It's a very thin one, hardly perceptible to the eye. But see!" Here she laid her finger on the fallen paper and drawing it towards her, pushed it carefully against the lower edge of the wainscot. Half of it at once disappeared.

"I could easily slip it all through," she assured them, withdrawing the sheet and leaping to her feet in triumph. "You know now where the missing page lies, Mr. Spielhagen. All that remains is for Mr. Van Broecklyn to get it for you."

IV

The cries of mingled astonishment and relief which greeted this simple elucidation of the mystery were broken by a curiously choked, almost unintelligible, cry. It came from the man thus appealed to, who, unnoticed by them all, had started at her first word and gradually, as action followed action, withdrawn himself till he now stood alone and in an attitude almost of defiance behind the large table in the centre of the library.

"I am sorry," he began, with a brusqueness which gradually toned down into a forced urbanity as he beheld every eye fixed upon him in amazement, "that circumstances forbid my being of assistance to you in this unfortunate matter. If the paper lies where you say, and I see no other explanation of its loss, I am afraid it will have to remain there for this night at least. The cement in which that door is embedded is thick as any wall; it would take men with pickaxes, possibly with dynamite, to make a breach there wide enough for any one to reach in. And we are far from any such help."

In the midst of the consternation caused by these words, the clock on the mantel behind his back rang out the hour. It was but a double stroke, but that meant two hours after midnight and had the effect of a knell in the hearts of those most interested.

"But I am expected to give that formula into the hands of our manager before six o'clock in the morning. The steamer sails at a quarter after."

"Can't you reproduce a copy of it from memory?" some one asked; "and insert it in its proper place among the pages you hold there?"

"The paper would not be the same. That would lead to questions and the truth would come out. As the chief value of the process contained in that formula lies in its secrecy, no explanation I could give would relieve me from the suspicions which an acknowledgment of the existence of a third copy, however well hidden, would entail. I should lose my great opportunity."

Mr. Cornell's state of mind can be imagined. In an access of mingled regret and despair, he cast a glance at Violet, who, with a nod of understanding, left the little room in which they still stood, and approached Mr. Van Broecklyn.

Lifting up her head,—for he was very tall,—and instinctively rising on her toes the nearer to reach his ear, she asked in a cautious whisper:

"Is there no other way of reaching that place?"

She acknowledged afterwards, that for one moment

her heart stood still from fear, such a change took place in his face, though she says he did not move a muscle. Then, just when she was expecting from him some harsh or forbidding word, he wheeled abruptly away from her and crossing to a window at his side, lifted the shade and looked out. When he returned, he was his usual self so far as she could see.

"There is a way," he now confided to her in a tone as low as her own, "but it can only be taken by a child."

"Not by me?" she asked, smiling down at her own childish proportions.

For an instant he seemed taken aback, then she saw his hand begin to tremble and his lips twitch. Somehow—she knew not why—she began to pity him, and asked herself as she felt rather than saw the struggle in his mind, that here was a trouble which if once understood would greatly dwarf that of the two men in the room behind them.

"I am discreet," she whisperingly declared. "I have heard the history of that door—how it was against the tradition of the family to have it opened. There must have been some very dreadful reason. But old superstitions do not affect me, and if you will allow me to take the way you mention, I will follow your bidding exactly, and will not trouble myself about anything but the recovery of this paper, which must lie only a little way inside that blocked-up door."

Was his look one of rebuke at her presumption, or just the constrained expression of a perturbed mind? Probably the latter, for while she watched him for some understanding of his mood, he reached out his hand and touched one of the satin folds crossing her shoulder.

"You would soil this irretrievably," said he.

"There is stuff in the stores for another," she smiled. Slowly his touch deepened into pressure. Watching him she saw the crust of some old fear or dominant superstition melt under her eyes, and was quite prepared, when he remarked, with what for him was a lightsome air:

"I will buy the stuff, if you will dare the darkness and

intricacies of our old cellar. I can give you no light. You will have to feel your way according to my direction."

"I am ready to dare anything."

He left her abruptly.

"I will warn Miss Digby," he called back. "She shall go with you as far as the cellar."

V

Violet in her short career as an investigator of mysteries had been in many a situation calling for more than womanly nerve and courage. But never—or so it seemed to her at the time—had she experienced a greater depression of spirit than when she stood with Miss Digby before a small door at the extreme end of the cellar, and understood that here was her road—a road which once entered, she must take alone.

First, it was such a small door! No child older than eleven could possibly squeeze through it. But she was of the size of a child of eleven and might possibly manage that difficulty.

Secondly: there are always some unforeseen possibilities in every situation, and though she had listened carefully to Mr. Van Broecklyn's directions and was sure that she knew them by heart, she wished she had kissed her father more tenderly in leaving him that night for the ball, and that she had not pouted so undutifully at some harsh stricture he had made. Did this mean fear? She despised the feeling if it did.

Thirdly: She hated darkness. She knew this when she offered herself for this undertaking; but she was in a bright room at the moment and only imagined what she must now face as a reality. But one jet had been lit in the cellar and that near the entrance. Mr. Van Broecklyn seemed not to need light, even in his unfastening of the small door which Violet was sure had been protected by more than one lock.

Doubt, shadow, and a solitary climb between unknown

walls, with only a streak of light for her goal, and the clinging pressure of Florence Digby's hand on her own for solace—surely the prospect was one to tax the courage of her young heart to its limit. But she had promised, and she would fulfil. So with a brave smile she stooped to the little door, and in another moment had started on her journey.

For journey the shortest distance may seem when every inch means a heart-throb and one grows old in traversing a foot. At first the way was easy; she had but to crawl up a slight incline with the comforting consciousness that two people were within reach of her voice, almost within sound of her beating heart. But presently she came to a turn, beyond which her fingers failed to reach any wall on her left. Then came a step up which she stumbled, and farther on a short flight, each tread of which she had been told to test before she ventured to climb it, lest the decay of innumerable years should have weakened the wood too much to bear her weight. One, two, three, four, five steps! Then a landing with an open space beyond. Half of her journey was done. Here she felt she could give a minute to drawing her breath naturally, if the air, unchanged in years, would allow her to do so. Besides, here she had been enjoined to do a certain thing and to do it according to instructions. Three matches had been given her and a little night candle. Denied all light up to now, it was at this point she was to light her candle and place it on the floor, so that in returning she should not miss the staircase and get a fall. She had promised to do this, and was only too happy to see a spark of light scintillate into life in the immeasurable darkness.

She was now in a great room long closed to the world, where once officers in Colonial wars had feasted, and more than one council had been held. A room, too, which had seen more than one tragic happening, as its almost unparalleled isolation proclaimed. So much Mr. Van Broecklyn had told her; but she was warned to be careful in traversing it and not upon any pretext to swerve

aside from the right-hand wall till she came to a huge mantelpiece. This passed, and a sharp corner turned, she ought to see somewhere in the dim spaces before her a streak of vivid light shining through the crack at the bottom of the blocked-up door. The paper should be somewhere near this streak.

All simple, all easy of accomplishment, if only that streak of light were all she was likely to see or think of. If the horror which was gripping her throat should not take shape! If things would remain shrouded in impenetrable darkness, and not force themselves in shadowy suggestion upon her excited fancy! But the blackness of the passage-way through which she had just struggled, was not to be found here. Whether it was the effect of that small flame flickering at the top of the staircase behind her, or of some change in her own powers of seeing, surely there was a difference in her present outlook. Tall shapes were becoming visible—the air was no longer blank—she could see—— Then suddenly she saw why. In the wall high up on her right was a window. It was small and all but invisible, being covered on the outside with vines, and on the inside with the cobwebs of a century. But some small gleams from the starlight night came through, making phantasms out of ordinary things, which unseen were horrible enough, and half seen choked her heart with terror.

"I cannot bear it," she whispered to herself even while creeping forward, her hand upon the wall. "I will close my eyes" was her next thought. "I will make my own darkness," and with a spasmodic forcing of her lids together, she continued to creep on, passing the mantelpiece, where she knocked against something which fell with an awful clatter.

This sound, followed as it was by that of smothered voices from the excited group awaiting the result of her experiment from behind the impenetrable wall she should be nearing now if she had followed her instructions aright, freed her instantly from her fancies; and opening her eyes once more, she cast a look ahead, and to her delight,

saw but a few steps away, the thin streak of bright light which marked the end of her journey.

It took her but a moment after that to find the missing page, and picking it up in haste from the dusty floor, she turned herself quickly about and joyfully began to retrace her steps. Why then, was it that in the course of a few minutes more her voice suddenly broke into a wild, unearthly shriek, which ringing with terror burst the bounds of that dungeon-like room, and sank, a barbed shaft, into the breasts of those awaiting the result of her doubtful adventure, at either end of this dread nothoroughfare.

What had happened?

If they had thought to look out, they would have seen that the moon—held in check by a bank of cloud occupying half the heavens—had suddenly burst into bounds and was sending long bars of revealing light into every uncurtained window.

VI

Florence Digby, in her short and sheltered life, had possibly never known any very great or deep emotion. But she touched the bottom of extreme terror at that moment, as with her ears still thrilling with Violet's piercing cry, she turned to look at Mr. Van Broecklyn, and beheld the instantaneous wreck it had made of this seemingly strong man. Not till he came to lie in his coffin would he show a more ghastly countenance; and trembling herself almost to the point of falling, she caught him by the arm and sought to read in his face what had happened. Something disastrous she was sure; something which he had feared and was partially prepared for, yet which in happening had crushed him. Was it a pitfall into which the poor little lady had fallen? If so—— But he is speaking—mumbling low words to himself. Some of them she can hear. He is reproaching himself—repeating over and over that he should never have taken such a chance; that he should have remembered her youth—the

weakness of a young girl's nerve. He had been mad, and now—and now——

With the repetition of this word his murmuring ceased. All his energies were now absorbed in listening at the low door separating him from what he was agonizing to know —a door impossible to enter, impossible to enlarge—a barrier to all help—an opening whereby sound might pass but nothing else, save her own small body, now lying—where?

"Is she hurt?" faltered Florence, stooping, herself, to listen. "Can you hear anything—anything?"

For an instant he did not answer; every faculty was absorbed in the one sense; then slowly and in gasps he began to mutter:

"I think—I hear—*something*. Her step—no, no, no step. All is as quiet as death; not a sound,—not a breath —she has fainted. O God! O God! Why this calamity on top of all!"

He had sprung to his feet at the utterance of this invocation, but next moment was down on his knees again, listening—listening.

Never was silence more profound; they were hearkening for murmurs from a tomb. Florence began to sense the full horror of it all, and was swaying helplessly when Mr. Van Broecklyn impulsively lifted his hand in an admonitory Hush! and through the daze of her faculties a small far sound began to make itself heard, growing louder as she waited, then becoming faint again, then altogether ceasing only to renew itself once more, till it resolved into an approaching step, faltering in its course, but coming ever nearer and nearer.

"She's safe! She's not hurt!" sprang from Florence's lips in inexpressible relief; and expecting Mr. Van Broecklyn to show an equal joy, she turned towards him, with the cheerful cry.

"Now if she has been so fortunate as to find that missing page, we shall all be repaid for our fright."

A movement on his part, a shifting of position which brought him finally to his feet, but he gave no other

proof of having heard her, nor did his countenance mirror her relief. "It is as if he dreaded, instead of hailed, her return," was Florence's inward comment as she watched him involuntarily recoil at each fresh token of Violet's advance.

Yet because this seemed so very unnatural, she persisted in her efforts to lighten the situation, and when he made no attempt to encourage Violet in her approach, she herself stooped and called out a cheerful welcome which must have rung sweetly in the poor little detective's ears.

A sorry sight was Violet, when, helped by Florence, she finally crawled into view through the narrow opening and stood once again on the cellar floor. Pale, trembling, and soiled with the dust of years, she presented a helpless figure enough, till the joy in Florence's face recalled some of her spirit, and, glancing down at her hand in which a sheet of paper was visible, she asked for Mr. Spielhagen.

"I've got the formula," she said. "If you will bring him, I will hand it over to him here."

Not a word of her adventure; nor so much as one glance at Mr. Van Broecklyn, standing far back in the shadows.

Nor was she more communicative, when, the formula restored and everything made right with Mr. Spielhagen, they all came together again in the library for a final word.

"I was frightened by the silence and the darkness, and so cried out," she explained in answer to their questions. "Any one would have done so who found himself alone in so musty a place," she added, with an attempt at lightsomeness which deepened the pallor on Mr. Van Broecklyn's cheek, already sufficiently noticeable to have been remarked upon by more than one.

"No ghosts?" laughed Mr. Cornell, too happy in the return of his hopes to be fully sensible of the feelings of those about him. "No whispers from impalpable lips or touches from spectre hands? Nothing to explain the

mystery of that room so long shut up that even Mr. Van Broecklyn declares himself ignorant of its secret?"

"Nothing," returned Violet, showing her dimples in full force now.

"If Miss Strange had any such experiences—if she has anything to tell worthy of so marked a curiosity, she will tell it now," came from the gentleman just alluded to, in tones so stern and strange that all show of frivolity ceased on the instant. "Have you anything to tell, Miss Strange?"

Greatly startled, she regarded him with widening eyes for a moment, then with a move towards the door, remarked, with a general look about her:

"Mr. Van Broecklyn knows his own house, and doubtless can relate its histories if he will. I am a busy little body who having finished my work am now ready to return home, there to wait for the next problem which an indulgent fate may offer me."

She was near the threshold—she was about to take her leave, when suddenly she felt two hands fall on her shoulder, and turning, met the eyes of Mr. Van Broecklyn burning into her own.

"You saw!" dropped in an almost inaudible whisper from his lips.

The shiver which shook her answered him better than any word.

With an exclamation of despair, he withdrew his hands, and facing the others now standing together in a startled group, he said, as soon as he could recover some of his self-possession:

"I must ask for another hour of your company. I can no longer keep my sorrow to myself. A dividing line has just been drawn across my life, and I must have the sympathy of someone who knows my past, or I shall go mad in my self-imposed solitude. Come back, Miss Strange. You of all others have the prior right to hear."

VI

"I shall have to begin," said he, when they were all seated and ready to listen, "by giving you some idea, not so much of the family tradition, as of the effect of this tradition upon all who bore the name of Van Broecklyn. This is not the only house, even in America, which contains a room shut away from intrusion. In England there are many. But there is this difference between most of them and ours. No bars or locks forcibly held shut the door we were forbidden to open. The command was enough; that and the superstitious fear which such a command, attended by a long and unquestioning obedience, was likely to engender.

"I know no more than you do why some early ancestor laid his ban upon this room. But from my earliest years I was given to understand that there was one latch in the house which was never to be lifted; that any fault would be forgiven sooner than that; that the honour of the whole family stood in the way of disobedience, and that I was to preserve that honour to my dying day. You will say that all this is fantastic, and wonder that sane people in these modern times should subject themselves to such a ridiculous restriction, especially when no good reason was alleged, and the very source of the tradition from which it sprung forgotten. You are right; but if you look long into human nature, you will see that the bonds which hold the firmest are not material ones—that an idea will make a man and mould a character—that it lies at the source of all heroisms and is to be courted or feared as the case may be.

"For me it possessed a power proportionate to my loneliness. I don't think there was ever a more lonely child. My father and mother were so unhappy in each other's companionship that one or other of them was almost always away. But I saw little of either even when they were at home. The constraint in their attitude towards each other affected their conduct towards me. I have asked myself more than once if either of them

had any real affection for me. To my father I spoke of her; to her of him; and never pleasurably. This I am forced to say, or you cannot understand my story. Would to God I could tell another tale! Would to God I had such memories as other men have of a father's clasp, a mother's kiss—but no! my grief, already profound, might have become abysmal. Perhaps it is best as it is; only, I might have been a different child, and made for myself a different fate—who knows.

"As it was, I was thrown almost entirely upon my own resources for any amusement. This led me to a discovery I made one day. In a far part of the cellar behind some heavy casks, I found a little door. It was so low—so exactly fitted to my small body, that I had the greatest desire to enter it. But I could not get around the casks. At last an expedient occurred to me. We had an old servant who came nearer loving me than any one else. One day when I chanced to be alone in the cellar, I took out my ball and began throwing it about. Finally it landed behind the casks, and I ran with a beseeching cry to Michael, to move them.

"It was a task requiring no little strength and address, but he managed, after a few herculean efforts, to shift them aside and I saw with delight my way opened to that mysterious little door. But I did not approach it then; some instinct deterred me. But when the opportunity came for me to venture there alone, I did so, in the most adventurous spirit, and began my operations by sliding behind the casks and testing the handle of the little door. It turned, and after a pull or two the door yielded. With my heart in my mouth, I stooped and peered in. I could see nothing—a black hole and nothing more. This caused me a moment's hesitation. I was afraid of the dark—had always been. But curiosity and the spirit of adventure triumphed. Saying to myself that I was Robinson Crusoe exploring the cave, I crawled in, only to find that I had gained nothing. It was as dark inside as it had looked to be from without.

"There was no fun in this, so I crawled back, and when

I tried the experiment again, it was with a bit of candle in my hand, and a surreptitious match or two. What I saw, when with a very trembling little hand I had lighted one of the matches, would have been disappointing to most boys, but not to me. The litter and old boards I saw in odd corners about me were full of possibilities, while in the dimness beyond I seemed to perceive a sort of staircase which might lead—— I do not think I made any attempt to answer that question even in my own mind, but when, after some hesitation and a sense of great daring, I finally crept up those steps, I remember very well my sensation at finding myself in front of a narrow closed door. It suggested too vividly the one in Grandfather's little room—the door in the wainscot which we were never to open. I had my first real trembling fit here, and at once fascinated and repelled by this obstruction I stumbled and lost my candle, which, going out in the fall, left me in total darkness and a very frightened state of mind. For my imagination which had been greatly stirred by my own vague thoughts of the forbidden room, immediately began to people the space about me with ghoulish figures. How should I escape them, how ever reach my own little room again undetected and in safety?

"But these terrors, deep as they were, were nothing to the real fright which seized me when, the darkness finally braved, and the way found back into the bright, wide-open halls of the house, I became conscious of having dropped something besides the candle. My match-box was gone—not *my* match-box, but my grandfather's which I had found lying on his table and carried off on this adventure, in all the confidence of irresponsible youth. To make use of it for a little while, trusting to his not missing it in the confusion I had noticed about the house that morning, was one thing; to lose it was another. It was no common box. Made of gold and cherished for some special reason well known to himself, I had often heard him say that some day I would appreciate its value and be glad to own it. And I had left it in that hole and at any minute he might miss it—possibly ask for it! The

day was one of torment. My mother was away or shut up in her room. My father—I don't know just what thoughts I had about him. He was not to be seen either, and the servants cast strange looks at me when I spoke his name. But I little realized the blow which had just fallen upon the house in his definite departure, and only thought of my own trouble, and of how I should meet my grandfather's eye when the hour came for him to draw me to his knee for his usual good-night.

"That I was spared this ordeal for the first time this very night first comforted me, then added to my distress. He had discovered his loss and was angry. On the morrow he would ask me for the box and I would have to lie, for never could I find the courage to tell him where I had been. Such an act of presumption he would never forgive, or so I thought as I lay and shivered in my little bed. That his coldness, his neglect, sprang from the discovery just made that my mother as well as my father had just fled the house forever was as little known to me as the morning calamity. I had been given my usual tendance and was tucked safely into bed; but the gloom, the silence which presently settled upon the house had a very different explanation in my mind from the real one. My sin (for such it loomed large in my mind by this time) coloured the whole situation and accounted for every event.

"At what hour I slipped from my bed on to the cold floor, I shall never know. To me it seemed to be in the dead of night; but I doubt if it were more than ten. So slowly creep away the moments to a wakeful child. I had made a great resolve. Awful as the prospect seemed to me,—frightened as I was by the very thought,—I had determined in my small mind to go down into the cellar, and into that midnight hole again, in search of the lost box. I would take a candle and matches, this time from my own mantel-shelf, and if everyone was asleep, as appeared from the deathly quiet of the house, I would be able to go and come without anybody ever being the wiser.

"Dressing in the dark, I found my matches and my

candle and, putting them in one of my pockets, softly opened my door and looked out. Nobody was stirring; every light was out except a solitary one in the lower hall. That this still burned conveyed no meaning to my mind. How could I know that the house was so still and the rooms so dark because everyone was out searching for some clue to my mother's flight? If I had looked at the clock—but I did not; I was too intent upon my errand, too filled with the fever of my desperate undertaking, to be affected by anything not bearing directly upon it.

"Of the terror caused by my own shadow on the wall as I made the turn in the hall below, I have as keen a recollection to-day as though it happened yesterday. But that did not deter me; nothing deterred me, till safe in the cellar I crouched down behind the casks to get my breath again before entering the hole beyond.

"I had made some noise in feeling my way around these casks, and I trembled lest these sounds had been heard upstairs! But this fear soon gave place to one far greater. Other sounds were making themselves heard. A din of small skurrying feet above, below, on every side of me! Rats! rats in the wall! rats on the cellar bottom! How I ever stirred from the spot I do not know, but when I did stir, it was to go forward, and enter the uncanny hole.

"I had intended to light my candle when I got inside; but for some reason I went stumbling along in the dark, following the wall till I got to the steps where I had dropped the box. Here a light was necessary, but my hand did not go to my pocket. I thought it better to climb the steps first, and softly one foot found the tread and then another. I had only three more to climb and then my right hand now feeling its way along the wall, would be free to strike a match. I climbed the three steps and was steadying myself against the door for a final plunge, when something happened—something so strange, so unexpected, and so incredible that I wonder I did not shriek aloud in my terror. The door was moving under my hand. It was slowly opening inward. I could feel the chill made by the widening crack. Moment by moment this chill increased;

the gap was growing—a presence was there—a presence before which I sank in a small heap upon the landing. Would it advance? Had it feet—hands? Was it a presence which could be felt?

"Whatever it was, it made no attempt to pass, and presently I lifted my head only to quake anew at the sound of a voice—a human voice—my mother's voice—so near me that by putting out my arms I might have touched her.

"She was speaking to my father. I knew it from the tone. She was saying words which, little understood as they were, made such a havoc in my youthful mind that I have never forgotten them.

"'I have come!' she said. 'They think I have fled the house and are looking far and wide for me. We shall not be disturbed. Who would think of looking here for either you or me.'

"*Here!* The word sank like a plummet in my breast. I had known for some few minutes that I was on the threshold of the forbidden room; but they were *in* it. I can scarcely make you understand the tumult which this awoke in my brain. Somehow, I had never thought that any such braving of the house's law would be possible.

"I heard my father's answer, but it conveyed no meaning to me. I also realized that he spoke from a distance,—that he was at one end of the room while we were at the other. I was presently to have this idea confirmed, for while I was striving with all my might and main to subdue my very heart-throbs so that she would not hear me or suspect my presence, the darkness—I should rather say the blackness of the place yielded to a flash of lightning—heat lightning, all glare and no sound—and I caught an instantaneous vision of my father's figure standing with gleaming things about him, which affected me at the moment as supernatural, but which, in later years, I decided to have been weapons hanging on a wall.

"She saw him too, for she gave a quick laugh and said they would not need any candles; and then, there was another flash and I saw something in his hand and some-

thing in hers, and though I did not yet understand, I felt myself turning deathly sick and gave a choking gasp which was lost in the rush she made into the centre of the room, and the keenness of her swift low cry.

"'*Garde-toi!* for only one of us will ever leave this room alive!'

"A duel! a duel to the death between this husband and wife—this father and mother—in this hole of dead tragedies and within the sight and hearing of their child! Has Satan ever devised a scheme more hideous for ruining the life of an eleven-year-old boy!

"Not that I took it all in at once. I was too innocent and much too dazed to comprehend such hatred, much less the passions which engendered it. I only knew that something horrible—something beyond the conception of my childish mind—was going to take place in the darkness before me; and the terror of it made me speechless; would to God it had made me deaf and blind and dead!

"She had dashed from her corner and he had slid away from his, as the next fantastic gleam which lit up the room showed me. It also showed the weapons in their hands, and for a moment I felt reassured when I saw that these were swords, for I had seen them before with foils in their hands practising for exercise, as they said, in the great garret. But the swords had buttons on them, and this time the tips were sharp and shone in the keen light.

"An exclamation from her and a growl of rage from him were followed by movements I could scarcely hear, but which were terrifying from their very quiet. Then the sound of a clash. The swords had crossed.

"Had the lightning flashed forth then, the end of one of them might have occurred. But the darkness remained undisturbed, and when the glare relit the great room again, they were already far apart. This called out a word from him; the one sentence he spoke—I can never forget it:

"'Rhoda, there is blood on your sleeve; I have wounded you. Shall we call it off and fly, as the poor creatures in there think we have, to the opposite ends of the earth?'

"I almost spoke; I almost added my childish plea to his for them to stop—to remember me and stop. But not a muscle in my throat responded to my agonized effort. Her cold, clear 'No!' fell before my tongue was loosed or my heart freed from the ponderous weight crushing it.

"'I have vowed and *I* keep my promises,' she went on in a tone quite strange to me. 'What would either's life be worth with the other alive and happy in this world?'

"He made no answer; and those subtle movements—shadows of movements I might almost call them—recommenced. Then there came a sudden cry, shrill and poignant—had Grandfather been in his room he would surely have heard it—and the flash coming almost simultaneously with its utterance, I saw what has haunted my sleep from that day to this, my father pinned against the wall, sword still in hand, and before him my mother, fiercely triumphant, her staring eyes fixed on his and——

"Nature could bear no more; the band loosened from my throat; the oppression lifted from my breast long enough for me to give one wild wail and she turned, saw (heaven sent its flashes quickly at this moment) and recognizing my childish form, all the horror of her deed (or so I have fondly hoped) rose within her, and she gave a start and fell full upon the point upturned to receive her.

"A groan; then a gasping sigh from him, and silence settled upon the room and upon my heart, and so far as I knew upon the whole created world.

"That is my story, friends. Do you wonder that I have never been or lived like other men?"

After a few moments of sympathetic silence, Mr. Van Broecklyn went on to say:

"I don't think I ever had a moment's doubt that my parents both lay dead on the floor of that great room. When I came to myself—which may have been soon, and may not have been for a long while—the lightning had ceased to flash, leaving the darkness stretching like a

blank pall between me and that spot in which were concentrated all the terrors of which my imagination was capable. I dared not enter it. I dared not take one step that way. My instinct was to fly and hide my trembling body again in my own bed; and associated with this, in fact dominating it and making me old before my time, was another—never to tell; never to let any one, least of all my grandfather—know what that forbidden room now contained. I felt in an irresistible sort of way that my father's and mother's honour was at stake. Besides, terror held me back; I felt that I should die if I spoke. Childhood has such terrors and such heroisms. Silence often covers in such, abysses of thought and feeling which astonish us in later years. There is no suffering like a child's, terrified by a secret which it dare not for some reason disclose.

"Events aided me. When, in desperation to see once more the light and all the things which linked me to life—my little bed, the toys on the window-sill, my squirrel in its cage—I forced myself to retraverse the empty house, expecting at every turn to hear my father's voice or come upon the image of my mother—yes, such was the confusion of my mind, though I knew well enough even then that they were dead and that I should never hear the one or see the other. I was so benumbed with the cold in my half-dressed condition, that I woke in a fever next morning after a terrible dream which forced from my lips the cry of 'Mother! Mother!'—only that.

"I was cautious even in delirium. This delirium and my flushed cheeks and shining eyes led them to be very careful of me. I was told that my mother was away from home; and when after two days of search they were quite sure that all efforts to find either her or my father were likely to prove fruitless, that she had gone to Europe where we would follow her as soon as I was well. This promise, offering as it did, a prospect of immediate release from the terrors which were consuming me, had an extraordinary effect upon me. I got up out of my bed saying that I was well now and ready to start on the

instant. The doctor, finding my pulse equable and my whole condition wonderfully improved, and attributing it, as was natural, to my hope of soon joining my mother, advised my whim to be humoured and this hope kept active till travel and intercourse with children should give me strength and prepare me for the bitter truth ultimately awaiting me. They listened to him and in twenty-four hours our preparations were made. We saw the house closed—with what emotions surging in one small breast, I leave you to imagine—and then started on our long tour. For five years we wandered over the continent of Europe, my grandfather finding distraction, as well as myself, in foreign scenes and associations.

"But return was inevitable. What I suffered on re-entering this house, God and my sleepless pillow alone know. Had any discovery been made in our absence; or would it be made now that renovation and repairs of all kinds were necessary? Time finally answered me. My secret was safe and likely to continue so, and this fact once settled, life became endurable, if not cheerful. Since then I have spent only two nights out of this house, and they were unavoidable. When my grandfather died I had the wainscot door cemented in. It was done from this side and the cement painted to match the wood. No one opened the door nor have I ever crossed its threshold. Sometimes I think I have been foolish; and sometimes I know that I have been very wise. My reason has stood firm; how do I know that it would have done so if I had subjected myself to the possible discovery that one or both of them might have been saved if I had disclosed instead of concealed my adventure."

A pause during which white horror had shone on every face; then with a final glance at Violet, he said:

"What sequel do you see to this story, Miss Strange? I can tell the past, I leave you to picture the future."

Rising, she let her eye travel from face to face till it rested on the one awaiting it, when she answered dreamily:

"If some morning in the news column there should

appear an account of the ancient and historic home of the Van Broecklyns having burned to the ground in the night, the whole country would mourn, and the city feel defrauded of one of its treasures. But there are five persons who would see in it the sequel which you ask for."

When this happened, as it did happen, some few weeks later, the astonishing discovery was made that no insurance had been put upon this house. Why was it that after such a loss Mr. Van Broecklyn seemed to renew his youth? It was a constant source of comment among his friends.

ANNA KATHARINE GREEN ROHLFS

THE THIEF

"And now, if you have all seen the coin and sufficiently admired it, you may pass it back. I make a point of never leaving it off the shelf for more than fifteen minutes."

The half dozen or more guests seated about the board of the genial speaker, glanced casually at each other as though expecting to see the object mentioned immediately produced.

But no coin appeared.

"I have other amusements waiting," suggested their host, with a smile in which even his wife could detect no signs of impatience. "Now let Robert put it back into the cabinet."

Robert was the butler.

Blank looks, negative gestures, but still no coin.

"Perhaps it is in somebody's lap," timidly ventured one of the younger women. "It doesn't seem to be on the table."

Immediately all the ladies began lifting their napkins and shaking out the gloves which lay under them, in an effort to relieve their own embarrassment and that of the gentlemen who had not even so simple a resource as this at their command.

"It can't be lost," protested Mr. Sedgwick, with an air of perfect confidence. "I saw it but a minute ago in somebody's hand. Darrow, you had it; what did you do with it?"

"Passed it along."

"Well, well, it must be under somebody's plate or

(From "Room Number 3," by Anna Katharine Green. Copyright, 1913, by Dodd, Mead & Company, New York.)

doily." And he began to move about his own and such dishes as were within reach of his hand.

Each guest imitated him, lifting glasses and turning over spoons till Mr. Sedgwick himself bade them desist. "It's slipped to the floor," he nonchalantly concluded. "A toast to the ladies, and we will give Robert the chance of looking for it."

As they drank this toast, his apparently careless, but quietly astute, glance took in each countenance about him. The coin was very valuable and its loss would be keenly felt by him. Had it slipped from the table some one's eye would have perceived it, some hand would have followed it. Only a minute or two before, the attention of the whole party had been concentrated upon it. Darrow had held it up for all to see, while he discoursed upon its history. He would take Darrow aside at the first opportunity and ask him—But —— it! how could he do that? These were his intimate friends. He knew them well, more than well, with one exception, and he—— Well, he was the handsomest of the lot and the most debonair and agreeable. A little more gay than usual to-night, possibly a trifle too gay, considering that a man of Mr. Blake's social weight and business standing sat at the board; but not to be suspected, no, not to be suspected, even if he was the next man after Darrow and had betrayed something like confusion when the eyes of the whole table turned his way at the former's simple statement of "I passed it on." Robert would find the coin; he was a fool to doubt it; and if Robert did not, why, he would simply have to pocket his chagrin, and not let a triviality like this throw a shadow over his hospitality.

All this, while he genially lifted his glass and proposed the health of the ladies. The constraint of the preceding moment was removed by his manner, and a dozen jests caused as many merry laughs. Then he pushed back his chair.

"And now, some music!" he cheerfully cried, as with lingering glances and some further pokings about of the table furniture, the various guests left their places and followed him into the adjoining room.

But the ladies were too nervous and the gentlemen not sufficiently sure of their voices to undertake the entertainment of the rest at a moment of such acknowledged suspense; and notwithstanding the exertions of their host and his quiet but much discomfited wife, it soon became apparent that but one thought engrossed them all, and that any attempt at conversation must prove futile so long as the curtains between the two rooms remained open and they could see Robert on his hands and knees searching the floor and shoving aside the rugs.

Darrow, who was Mr. Sedgwick's brother-in-law and almost as much at home in the house as Sedgwick himself, made a move to draw these curtains, but something in his relative's face stopped him and he desisted with some laughing remark which did not attract enough attention, even, to elicit any response.

"I hope his eyesight is good," murmured one of the young girls, edging a trifle forward. "Mayn't I help him look? They say at home that I am the only one in the house who can find anything."

Mr. Sedgwick smiled indulgently at the speaker, (a round-faced, round-eyed, merry-hearted girl whom in days gone by he had dandled on his knees), but answered quite quickly for him:

"Robert will find it if it is there." Then, distressed at this involuntary disclosure of his thought, added in his whole-hearted way: "It's such a little thing, and the room is so big and a round object rolls unexpectedly far, you know. Well, have you got it?" he eagerly demanded, as the butler finally showed himself in the door.

"No, sir; and it's not in the dining-room. I have cleared the table and thoroughly searched the floor."

Mr. Sedgwick knew that he had. He had no doubts about Robert. Robert had been in his employ for years and had often handled his coins and, at his order, sometimes shown them.

"Very well," said he, "we'll not bother about it any more to-night; you may draw the curtains."

But here the clear, almost strident voice of the youngest man of the party interposed.

"Wait a minute," said he. "This especial coin is the great treasure of Mr. Sedgwick's valuable collection. It is unique in this country, and not only worth a great deal of money, but cannot be duplicated at any cost. There are only three of its stamp in the world. Shall we let the matter pass, then, as though it were of small importance? I feel that we cannot; that we are, in a measure, responsible for its disappearance. Mr. Sedgwick handed it to us to look at, and while it was going through our hands it vanished. What must he think? What has he every right to think? I need not put it into words; you know what you would think, what you could not help but think, if the object were yours and it was lost in this way. Gentlemen—I leave the ladies entirely out of this—I do not propose that he shall have further opportunity to associate me with this very natural doubt. I demand the privilege of emptying my pockets here and now, before any of us have left his presence. I am a connoisseur in coins myself and consequently find it imperative to take the initiative in this matter. As I propose to spare the ladies, let us step back into the dining-room. Mr. Sedgwick, pray don't deny me; I'm thoroughly in earnest, I assure you."

The astonishment created by this audacious proposition was so great, and the feeling it occasioned so intense, that for an instant all stood speechless. Young Hammersley was a millionaire himself, and generous to a fault, as all knew. Under no circumstances would any one even suspect him of appropriating anything, great or small, to which he had not a perfect right. Nor was he likely to imagine for a moment that any one would. That he could make such a proposition then, based upon any such plea, argued a definite suspicion in some other quarter, which could not pass unrecognised. In vain Mr. Sedgwick raised his voice in frank and decided protest, two of the gentlemen had already made a quick move toward Robert, who still stood, stupefied by the situation, with his hand on the cord which controlled the curtains.

"He is quite right," remarked one of these, as he passed into the dining-room. "I shouldn't sleep a wink to-night if this question remained unsettled." The other, the oldest man present, the financier of whose standing and highly esteemed character I have already spoken, said nothing, but followed in a way to show that his mind was equally made up.

The position in which Mr. Sedgwick found himself placed was far from enviable. With a glance at the two remaining gentlemen, he turned towards the ladies now standing in a close group at the other end of the room. One of them was his wife, and he quivered internally as he noted the deep red of her distressed countenance. But it was the others he addressed, singling out, with the rare courtesy which was his by nature, the one comparative stranger, Darrow's niece, a Rochester girl, who could not be finding this, her first party in Boston, very amusing.

"I hope you will appreciate the dilemma in which I have been placed by these gentlemen," he began, "and will pardon——"

But here he noticed that she was not in the least attending; her eyes were on the handsome figure of Hugh Clifford, her uncle's neighbour at table, who in company with Mr. Hammersley was still hesitating in the doorway. As Mr. Sedgwick stopped his useless talk, the two passed in and the sound of her fluttering breath as she finally turned a listening ear his way, caused him to falter as he repeated his assurances and begged her indulgence.

She answered with some conventional phrase which he forgot while crossing the room. But the remembrance of her slight satin-robed figure, drawn up in an attitude whose carelessness was totally belied by the anxiety of her half-averted glance, followed him into the presence of the four men awaiting him. Four? I should say five, for Robert was still there, though in a corner by himself, ready, no doubt, to share any attempt which the others might make to prove their innocence.

"The ladies will await us in the music-room," an-

nounced the host on entering; and then paused, disconcerted by the picture suddenly disclosed to his eye. On one side stood the two who had entered first, with their eyes fixed in open sternness on young Clifford, who, quite alone on the rug, faced them with a countenance of such pronounced pallor that there seemed to be nothing else in the room. As his features were singularly regular and his almost perfect mouth accentuated by a smile as set as his figure was immobile, the effect was so startling that not only Mr. Sedgwick, but every other person present, no doubt, wished that the plough had never turned the furrow which had brought this wretched coin to light.

However, the affair had gone too far now for retreat, as was shown by Mr. Blake, the elderly financier whom all were ready to recognise as the chief guest there. With an apologetic glance at Mr. Hammersley, the impetuous young millionaire who had first proposed this embarrassing procedure, he advanced to an empty side-table and began, in a quiet, business-like way, to lay on it the contents of his various pockets. As the pile rose, the silence grew, the act in itself was so simple, the motive actuating it so serious and out of accord with the standing of the company and the nature of the occasion. When all was done, he stepped up to Mr. Sedgwick, with his arms raised and held out from his body.

"Now accommodate me," said he, "by running your hands up and down my chest. I have a secret pocket there which should be empty at this time."

Mr. Sedgwick, fascinated by his look, did as he was bid, reporting shortly:

"You are quite correct. I find nothing there."

Mr. Blake stepped back. As he did so, every eye, suddenly released from his imposing figure, flashed towards the immovable Clifford, to find him still absorbed by the action and attitude of the man who had just undergone what to him doubtless appeared a degrading ordeal. Pale before, he was absolutely livid now, though otherwise unchanged. To break the force of what appeared to be an open, if involuntary, self-betrayal, another guest stepped

forward; but no sooner had he raised his hand to his vest-pocket than Clifford moved, and in a high, strident voice totally unlike his usual tones remarked:

"This is all—all—very interesting and commendable, no doubt. But for such a procedure to be of any real value it should be entered into by all. Gentlemen"—his rigidity was all gone now and so was his pallor—"I am unwilling to submit myself to what, in my eyes, is an act of unnecessary humiliation. Our word should be enough. I have not the coin——" Stopped by the absolute silence, he cast a distressed look into the faces about him, till it reached that of Mr. Sedgwick, where it lingered, in an appeal to which that gentleman, out of his great heart, instantly responded.

"One *should* take the word of the gentleman he invites to his house. We will excuse you, and excuse all the others from the unnecessary ceremony which Mr. Blake has been good enough to initiate."

But this show of favour was not to the mind of the last-mentioned gentleman, and met with instant reproof.

"Not so fast, Sedgwick. I am the oldest man here and I did not feel it was enough simply to state that this coin was not on my person. As to the question of humiliation, it strikes me that humiliation would lie, in this instance, in a refusal for which no better excuse can be given than the purely egotistical one of personal pride."

At this attack, the fine head of Clifford rose, and Darrow, remembering the girl within, felt instinctively grateful that she was not here to note the effect it gave to his person.

"I regret to differ," said he. "To me no humiliation could equal that of demonstrating in this open manner the fact of one's not being a thief."

Mr. Blake gravely surveyed him. For some reason the issue seemed no longer to lie between Clifford and the actual loser of the coin, but between him and his fellow guest, this uncompromising banker.

"A thief!" repeated the young man, in an indescribable tone full of bitterness and scorn.

Mr. Blake remained unmoved; he was a just man but strict, hard to himself, hard to others. But he was not entirely without heart. Suddenly his expression lightened. A certain possible explanation of the other's attitude had entered his mind.

"Young men sometimes have reasons for their susceptibilities which the old forget. If you have such—if you carry a photograph, believe that we have no interest in pictures of any sort to-night and certainly would fail to recognise them."

A smile of disdain flickered across the young man's lip. Evidently it was no discovery of this kind that he feared.

"I carry no photographs," said he; and, bowing low to his host, he added in a measured tone which but poorly hid his profound agitation, "I regret to have interfered in the slightest way with the pleasure of the evening. If you will be so good as to make my excuses to the ladies, I will withdraw from a presence upon which I have made so poor an impression."

Mr. Sedgwick prized his coin and despised deceit, but he could not let a guest leave him in this manner. Instinctively he held out his hand. Proudly young Clifford dropped his own into it; but the lack of mutual confidence was felt and the contact was a cold one. Half regretting his impulsive attempt at courtesy, Mr. Sedgwick drew back, and Clifford was already at the door leading into the hall, when Hammersley, who by his indiscreet proposition had made all this trouble for him, sprang forward and caught him by the arm.

"Don't go," he whispered. "You're done for if you leave like this. I—I was a brute to propose such an asinine thing, but having done so I am bound to see you out of the difficulty. Come into the adjoining room—there is nobody there at present—and we will empty our pockets together and find this lost article if we can. I may have pocketed it myself, in a fit of abstraction."

Did the other hesitate? Some thought so; but, if he did, it was but momentarily.

"I cannot," he muttered; "think what you will of me,

but let me go." And dashing open the door he disappeared from their sight just as light steps and the rustle of skirts were heard again in the adjoining room.

"There are the ladies. What shall we say to them?" queried Sedgwick, stepping slowly towards the intervening curtains.

"Tell them the truth," enjoined Mr. Blake, as he hastily repocketed his own belongings. "Why should a handsome devil like that be treated with any more consideration than another? He has a secret if he hasn't a coin. Let them know this. It may save some one a future heartache."

The last sentence was muttered, but Mr. Sedgwick heard it. Perhaps that was why his first movement on entering the adjoining room was to cross over to the cabinet and shut and lock the heavily panelled door which had been left standing open. At all events, the action drew general attention and caused an instant silence, broken the next minute by an ardent cry:

"So your search was futile?"

It came from the lady least known, the interesting young stranger whose personality had made so vivid an impression upon him.

"Quite so," he answered, hastily facing her with an attempted smile. "The gentleman decided not to carry matters to the length first proposed. The object was not worth it. I approved their decision. This was meant for a joyous occasion. Why mar it by unnecessary unpleasantness?"

She had given him her full attention while he was speaking, but her eye wandered away the moment he had finished and rested searchingly on the other gentlemen. Evidently she missed a face she had expected to find there, for her colour changed and she drew back behind the other ladies with the light, unmusical laugh women sometimes use to hide a secret emotion.

It brought Mr. Darrow forward.

"Some were not willing to subject themselves to what they considered an unnecessary humiliation," he curtly remarked. "Mr. Clifford——"

"There! let us drop it," put in his brother-in-law. "I've lost my coin and that's the end of it. I don't intend to have the evening spoiled for a thing like that. Music! ladies, music, and a jolly air! No more dumps." And with as hearty a laugh as he could command in face of the sombre looks he encountered on every side, he led the way back into the music-room.

Once there the women seemed to recover their spirits; that is, such as remained. One had disappeared. A door opened from this room into the main hall and through this a certain young lady had vanished before the others had had time to group themselves about the piano. We know who this lady was; possibly, we know, too, why her hostess did not follow her.

Meanwhile, Mr. Clifford had gone upstairs for his coat, and was lingering there, the prey of some very bitter reflections. Though he had encountered nobody on the stairs, and neither heard nor saw any one in the halls, he felt confident that he was not unwatched. He remembered the look on the butler's face as he tore himself away from Hammersley's restraining hand, and he knew what that fellow thought and also was quite able to guess what that fellow would do, if his suspicions were further awakened. This conviction brought an odd and not very open smile to his face, as he finally turned to descend the one flight which separated him from the front door he was so ardently desirous of closing behind him for ever.

A moment and he would be down; but the steps were many and seemed to multiply indefinitely as he sped below. Should his departure be noted, and some one advance to detain him! He fancied he heard a rustle in the open space under the stairs. Were any one to step forth, Robert or—— With a start, he paused and clutched the banister. Some one had stepped forth; a woman! The swish of her skirts was unmistakable. He felt the chill of a new dread. Never in his short but triumphant career had he met coldness or disapproval in the eye of a woman. Was he to encounter it now? If so, it would go hard with him. He trembled as he

turned his head to see which of the four it was. If it should prove to be his hostess— But it was not she; it was Darrow's young friend, the pretty inconsequent girl he had chatted with at the dinner-table, and afterwards completely forgotten in the events which had centred all his thoughts upon himself. And she was standing there, waiting for him! He would have to pass her,—notice her, —speak.

But when the encounter occurred and their eyes met, he failed to find in hers any sign of the disapproval he feared, but instead a gentle womanly interest which he might interpret deeply, or otherwise, according to the measure of his need.

That need seemed to be a deep one at this instant, for his countenance softened perceptibly as he took her quietly extended hand.

"Good-night," she said; "I am just going myself," and with an entrancing smile of perfect friendliness, she fluttered past him up the stairs.

It was the one and only greeting which his sick heart could have sustained without flinching. Just this friendly farewell of one acquaintance to another, as though no change had taken place in his relations to society and the world. And she was a woman and not a thoughtless girl! Staring after her slight, elegant figure, slowly ascending the stair, he forgot to return her cordial greeting. What delicacy, and yet what character there was in the poise of her spirited head! He felt his breath fail him, in his anxiety for another glance from her eye, for some sign, however small, that she had carried the thought of him up those few, quickly-mounted steps. Would he get it? She is at the bend of the stair; she pauses—turns, a nod,—and she is gone.

With an impetuous gesture, he dashed from the house.

In the drawing-room the noise of the closing door was heard, and a change at once took place in the attitude and expression of all present. The young millionaire approached Mr. Sedgwick and confidentially remarked:

"There goes your precious coin. I'm sure of it. I even

think I can tell the exact place in which it is hidden. His hand went to his left coat-pocket once too often."

"That's right. I noticed the action also," chimed in Mr. Darrow, who had stepped up, unobserved. "And I noticed something else. His whole appearance altered from the moment this coin came on the scene. An indefinable half-eager, half-furtive look crept into his eye as he saw it passed from hand to hand. I remember it now, though it didn't make much impression upon me at the time."

"And I remember another thing," supplemented Hammersley in his anxiety to set himself straight with these men of whose entire approval he was not quite sure. "He raised his napkin to his mouth very frequently during the meal and held it there longer than is usual, too. Once he caught me looking at him, and for a moment he flushed scarlet, then he broke out with one of his witty remarks and I had to laugh like everybody else. If I am not mistaken, his napkin was up and his right hand working behind it, about the time Mr. Sedgwick requested the return of his coin."

"The idiot! Hadn't he sense enough to know that such a loss wouldn't pass unquestioned? The gem of the collection; known all over the country, and he's not even a connoisseur."

"No; I've never even heard him mention numismatics."

"Mr. Darrow spoke of its value. Perhaps that was what tempted him. I know that Clifford's been rather down on his luck lately."

"He? Well, he don't look it. There isn't one of us so well set up. Pardon me, Mr. Hammersley, you understand what I mean. He perhaps relies a little bit too much on his fine clothes."

"He needn't. His face is his fortune—all the one he's got, I hear it said. He had a pretty income from Consolidated Silver, but that's gone up and left him in what you call difficulties. If he has debts besides——"

But here Mr. Darrow was called off. His niece wanted to see him for one minute in the hall. When he came back it was to make his adieu and hers. She had been

taken suddenly indisposed and his duty was to see her immediately home. This broke up the party, and amid general protestations the various guests were taking their leave when the whole action was stopped by a smothered cry from the dining-room, and the precipitate entrance of Robert, asking for Mr. Sedgwick.

"What's up? What's happened?" demanded that gentleman, hurriedly advancing towards the agitated butler.

"Found!" he exclaimed, holding up the coin between his thumb and forefinger. "It was standing straight up between two leaves of the table. It tumbled and fell to the floor as Luke and I were taking them out."

Silence which could be felt for a moment. Then each man turned and surveyed his neighbour, while the women's voices rose in little cries that were almost hysterical.

"I knew that it would be found, and found here," came from the hallway in rich, resonant tones. "Uncle, do not hurry; I am feeling better," followed in unconscious naïveté, as the young girl stepped in, showing a countenance in which were small signs of indisposition or even of depressed spirits.

Mr. Darrow, with a smile of sympathetic understanding, joined the others now crowding about the butler.

"I noticed the crack between these two leaves when I pushed about the plates and dishes," he was saying. "But I never thought of looking in it for the missing coin. I'm sure I'm very sorry that I didn't."

Mr. Darrow, to whom these words had recalled a circumstance he had otherwise completely forgotten, anxiously remarked: "That must have happened shortly after it left my hand. I recall now that the lady sitting between me and Clifford gave it a twirl which sent it spinning over the bare table-top. I don't think she realised the action. She was listening—we all were—to a flow of bright repartee going on below us, and failed to follow the movements of the coin. Otherwise, she would have spoken. But what a marvel that it should have reached that crack in just the position to fall in!"

"It wouldn't happen again, not if we spun it there for a month of Sundays."

"But Mr. Clifford!" put in an agitated voice.

"Yes, it has been rather hard on him. But he shouldn't have such keen sensibilities. If he had emptied out his pockets cheerfully and at the first intimation, none of this unpleasantness would have happened. Mr. Sedgwick, I congratulate you upon the recovery of this valuable coin, and am quite ready to offer my services if you wish to make Mr. Clifford immediately acquainted with Robert's discovery."

"Thank you, but I will perform that duty myself," was Mr. Sedgwick's quiet rejoinder, as he unlocked the door of his cabinet and carefully restored the coin to its proper place.

When he faced back, he found his guests on the point of leaving. Only one gave signs of any intention of lingering. This was the elderly financier who had shown such stern resolve in his treatment of Mr. Clifford's so-called sensibilities. He had confided his wife to the care of Mr. Darrow, and now met Mr. Sedgwick with this remark:

"I'm going to ask a favour of you. If, as you have intimated, it is your intention to visit Mr. Clifford to-night, I should like to go with you. I don't understand this young man and his unaccountable attitude in this matter, and it is very important that I should. Have you any objection to my company? My motor is at the door, and we can settle the affair in twenty minutes."

"None," returned his host, a little surprised, however, at the request. "His pride does seem a little out of place, but he was among comparative strangers, and seemed to feel his honour greatly impugned by Hammersley's unfortunate proposition. I'm sorry way down to the ground for what has occurred, and cannot carry him our apologies too soon."

"No, you cannot," retorted the other shortly. And so seriously did he utter this that no time was lost by Mr. Sedgwick, and as soon as they could get into their

coats, they were in the motor and on their way to the young man's apartment.

Their experience began at the door. A man was lolling there who told them that Mr. Clifford had changed his quarters; where he did not know. But upon the production of a five-dollar bill, he remembered enough about it to give them a number and street where possibly they might find him. In a rush, they hastened there; only to hear the same story from the sleepy elevator boy anticipating his last trip up for the night.

"Mr. Clifford left a week ago; he didn't tell me where he was going."

Nevertheless the boy knew; that they saw, and another but smaller bill came into requisition and awoke his sleepy memory.

The street and number which he gave made the two well-to-do men stare. But they said nothing, though the looks they cast back at the second-rate quarters they were leaving, so far below the elegant apartment house they had visited first, were sufficiently expressive. The scale of descent from luxury to positive discomfort was proving a rapid one and prepared them for the dismal, ill-cared-far, altogether repulsive doorway before which they halted next. No attendant waited here; not even an elevator boy; the latter for the good reason that there was no elevator. An uninviting flight of stairs was before them; and on the few doors within sight a simple card showed the name of the occupant.

Mr. Sedgwick glanced at his companion.

"Shall we go up?" he asked.

Mr. Blake nodded. "We'll find him," said he, "if it takes all night."

"Surely he cannot have sunk lower than this."

"Remembering his get-up I do not think so. Yet who knows? Some mystery lies back of his whole conduct. Dining in your home, with this to come back to! I don't wonder——"

But here a thought struck him. Pausing with his foot on the stair, he turned a flushed countenance towards Mr.

Sedgwick. "I've an idea," said he. "Perhaps——" He whispered the rest.

Mr. Sedgwick stared and shook his shoulders. "Possibly," said he, flushing slightly in his turn. Then, as they proceeded up, "I feel like a brute, anyway. A sorry night's business all through, unless the end proves better than the beginning."

"We'll start from the top. Something tells me that we shall find him close under the roof. Can you read the names by such a light?"

"Barely; but I have matches."

And now there might have been witnessed by any chance home-comer the curious sight of two extremely well-dressed men pottering through the attic hall of this decaying old domicile, reading the cards on the doors by means of a lighted match.

And vainly. On none of the cards could be seen the name they sought.

"We're on the wrong track," protested Mr. Blake. "No use keeping this up," but found himself stopped, when about to turn away, by a gesture of Sedgwick's.

"There's a light under the door you see there untagged," said he. "I'm going to knock."

He did so. There was a sound within and then utter silence.

He knocked again. A man's step was heard approaching the door, then again the silence.

Mr. Sedgwick made a third essay, and then the door was suddenly pulled inward and in the gap they saw the handsome face and graceful figure of the young man they had so lately encountered amid palatial surroundings. But how changed! how openly miserable! and when he saw who his guests were, how proudly defiant of their opinion and presence.

"You have found the coin," he quietly remarked. "I appreciate your courtesy in coming here to inform me of it. Will not that answer, without further conversation? I am on the point of retiring and—and——"

Even the hardihood of a very visible despair gave way

for an instant as he met Mr. Sedgwick's eye. In the break which followed, the older man spoke.

"Pardon us, but we have come thus far with a double purpose. First, to tender our apologies, which you have been good enough to accept; secondly, to ask, in no spirit of curiosity, I assure you, a question that I seem to see answered, but which I should be glad to hear confirmed by your lips. May we not come in?"

The question was put with a rare smile such as sometimes was seen on this hard-grained handler of millions, and the young man, seeing it, faltered back, leaving the way open for them to enter. The next minute he seemed to regret the impulse, for backing against a miserable table they saw there, he drew himself up with an air as nearly hostile as one of his nature could assume.

"I know of no question," said he, "which I feel at this very late hour inclined to answer. A man who has been tracked as I must have been for you to find me here, is hardly in a mood to explain his poverty or the mad desire for former luxuries which took him to the house of one friendly enough, he thought, to accept his presence without inquiry as to the place he lived in or the nature or number of the reverses which had brought him to such a place as this."

"I do not—believe me—" faltered Mr. Sedgwick, greatly embarrassed and distressed. In spite of the young man's attempts to hide the contents of the table, he had seen the two objects lying there—a piece of bread or roll, and a half-cocked revolver.

Mr. Blake had seen them, too, and at once took the word out of his companion's mouth.

"You mistake us," he said coldly, "as well as the nature of our errand. We are here from no motive of curiosity, as I have before said, nor from any other which might offend or distress you. We—or rather I am here on business. I have a position to offer to an intelligent, upright, enterprising young man. Your name has been given me. It was given me before this dinner, to which I went —if Mr. Sedgwick will pardon my plain speaking—chiefly

for the purpose of making your acquaintance. The result was what you know, and possibly now you can understand my anxiety to see you exonerate yourself from the doubts you yourself raised by your attitude of resistance to the proposition made by that head-long, but well-meaning, young man of many millions, Mr. Hammersley. I wanted to find in you the honourable characteristics necessary to the man who is to draw an eight thousand dollars a year salary under my eye. I still want to do this. If then you are willing to make this whole thing plain to me—for it is not plain—not wholly plain, Mr. Clifford—then you will find in me a friend such as few young fellows can boast of, for I like you—I will say that—and where I like——"

The gesture with which he ended the sentence was almost superfluous, in face of the change which had taken place in the aspect of the man he addressed. Wonder, doubt, hope, and again incredulity were lost at last in a recognition of the other's kindly intentions toward himself, and the prospects which they opened out before him. With a shame-faced look, and yet with a manly acceptance of his own humiliation that was not displeasing to his visitors, he turned about and pointing to the morsel of bread lying on the table before them, he said to Mr. Sedgwick:

"Do you recognise that? It is from your table, and—and—it is not the only piece I had hidden in my pockets. I had not eaten in twenty-four hours when I sat down to dinner this evening. I had no prospect of another morsel for to-morrow and—and—I was afraid of eating my fill—there were ladies—and so—and so——"

They did not let him finish. In a flash they had both taken in the room. Not an article which could be spared was anywhere visible. His dress-suit was all that remained to him of former ease and luxury. That he had retained, possibly for just such opportunities as had given him a dinner to-night. Mr. Blake understood at last, and his iron lip trembled.

"Have you no friends?" he asked. "Was it necessary to go hungry?"

"Could I ask alms or borrow what I could not pay? It was a position I was after, and positions do not come at call. Sometimes they come without it," he smiled with the dawning of his old-time grace on his handsome face, "but I find that one can see his resources go, dollar by dollar, and finally, cent by cent, in the search for employment no one considers necessary to a man like me. Perhaps if I had had less pride, had been willing to take you or any one else into my confidence, I might not have sunk to these depths of humiliation; but I had not the confidence in men which this last half hour has given me, and I went blundering on, hiding my needs and hoping against hope for some sort of result to my efforts. This pistol is not mine. I did borrow this, but I did not mean to use it, unless nature reached the point where it could stand no more. I thought the time had come to-night when I left your house, Mr. Sedgwick, suspected of theft. It seemed the last straw; but—but—a woman's look has held me back. I hesitated and—now you know the whole," said he; "that is, if you can understand why it was more possible for me to brave the contumely of such a suspicion than to open my pockets and disclose the crusts I had hidden there."

"I can understand," said Mr. Sedgwick; "but the opportunity you have given us for doing so must not be shared by others. We will undertake your justification, but it must be made in our own way and after the most careful considerations; eh, Mr. Blake?"

"Most assuredly; and if Mr. Clifford will present himself at my office early in the morning, we will first breakfast and then talk business."

Young Clifford could only hold out his hand, but when, his two friends gone, he sat in contemplation of his changed prospects, one word and one only left his lips, uttered in every inflection of tenderness, hope, and joy. "Edith! Edith! Edith!"

It was the name of the sweet young girl who had shown her faith in him at the moment when his heart was lowest and despair at its culmination.

J. S. FLETCHER

THE SECRET OF THE BARBICAN

Mr. Septimus Hellard, an elderly and eminently respectable North Country solicitor, brought down to a West of England town on important business, found that business unexpectedly concluded on the second morning of his visit and himself faced with four spare hours before he could get an express train to London. He was not the sort of man to spend any time in idleness; accordingly, having lunched at his hotel and paid his bill, he inquired of the venerable head waiter if there was anything remarkable in Wilchester which he could go and see. And the head waiter, sizing up the general aspect of his questioner, suggested that Mr. Hellard should cross the market square to the Wilchester and County Museum, an ancient building which he pointed out from the window of the coffee room.

"The very thing!" exclaimed Mr. Hellard, and immediately set out.

The head waiter could have made no better suggestion. Mr. Hellard had all his life been interested in antiquarian and archæological matters; his was the sort of mind that would contentedly spend hours in poring over an old document, and days in an endeavour to decipher an inscription on some moss-grown monument. He accordingly entered the portals of the Wilchester Museum with feelings of pleasurable anticipation, and for the next half hour was absorbed in a general contemplation of the various exhibits. After which, being a man of method, he proceeded to devote himself to his own particular hobby—coins.

(From "The Secret of the Barbican," by J. S. Fletcher. By permission of the owners of the copyright, Doubleday, Doran & Co., Inc., Garden City.)

There were several cases of coins in that Wilchester Museum, all neatly arranged and set out—gold, silver, bronze—ranging from the earliest times of Roman occupation of this country to the later days of the Stuart period. Mr. Hellard was interested in all of them, but his interest was suddenly transformed into amazement as he stopped before the centre of one case, peered at it for a moment, started violently, and let out a sharp, uncontrollable ejaculation.

"Heaven bless my life and soul!" he exclaimed, careless whether anybody heard him or not, "What do I see? Can I really believe my eyes?"

In order to assure himself that his eyes did not deceive him, Mr. Hellard produced a magnifying glass of strong power from his inner pocket, polished it with his silk handkerchief, and looked, half fearfully, half hopefully, at the exhibit which had raised in him these violent emotions. To most people that exhibit would have seemed a very simple, very ordinary thing. In mere outward appearance it was nothing but a stout card, on which, secured by stout clips, were three old silver coins, each about the size of a modern two shilling piece. They were in remarkably fresh and good condition, the lettering and mounting was sharp and clear, as if they had just come from some mint. And on the bottom half of the card was inscribed in clear, bold handwriting, these lines:

"Fine Set of Famous Sarklestowe
Siege Coins.
Lent by F. Paver-Crompton, Esq., F.S.A."

Mr. Hellard looked through his magnifying glass—once, twice, thrice. Then he put it back in his pocket, took his silk handkerchief out and mopped his forehead.

"Heaven bless me!" he muttered. "'Tis they without a doubt! Extraordinary."

With that he hurried out of the room and into a lobby in which a caretaker sat toasting his toes by the fire and reading a newspaper.

"I say!" said Mr. Hellard, grappling with his excitement and striving to be calm. "There are some exhibits in there—several, described as being lent by Mr. Paver-Crompton. Can you tell me where Mr. Paver-Crompton lives, now? Is it near here? Is it——"

The caretaker arose in silence, laid down his paper, moved heavily to the door, opened it, and beckoned the visitor outside into the market square. He extended a thick forefinger.

"You see that old red brick mansion a-standing under them trees where the rooks is a-flying?" he said. "That there is Mr. Paver-Crompton's residence. Little door in the garden wall, with a small brass plate on it—way into the front entrance. Thank'ee sir."

Mr. Hellard had pressed a shilling into his informant's hand, and was half-way along the market square before the caretaker could regain his fire. As he hurried he pulled out his card case; he had a card all ready for the trim parlour-maid, who presently responded to his ring, and he almost cried aloud with joy when he heard that Mr. Paver-Crompton was at home.

Two minutes later Mr. Hellard found himself in Mr. Paver-Crompton's presence, in a room so filled with folios, octavos, old prints, old curiosities that Mr. Paver-Crompton himself, an elderly gentleman of a twinkling eye and pleasant smile, seemed as if he had been taken prisoner there, and would never be able to get out again. Mr. Hellard executed a deep bow; Mr. Paver-Crompton bowed, too, and glanced at his visitor's card.

"Mr. Hellard?" he said. "And from Sarklestowe? A long way off, and a deeply interesting place. I possess——"

"Sir," exclaimed Mr. Hellard excitedly, "you possess a set of our famous siege coins, struck in 1647, when our ancient castle was beleaguered. I have just seen them—in your museum. Where, I beg you to tell me—where did you get those coins?"

"Bought 'em!" answered Mr. Paver-Crompton with alacrity. "Last year."

Mr. Hellard gasped, dropped into the only chair that

was not filled with massive tomes or curiosities, and, staring steadily at his host, rubbed his knees.

"Sir," he said in a low, concentrated voice, "that set of coins is the property of the Sarklestowe Corporation, to which body I am legal adviser. We lost that set—which is almost unique, and, indeed, is unique in one way, for it was the very first set ever struck—some years ago, under the most extraordinary and mysterious circumstances. Which," he concluded impressively, "have never been explained or accounted for from that day to this."

Mr. Paver-Crompton reseated himself at his desk and stared at his visitor.

"But," he said, "how do you know that set's yours? There are more sets than one in existence. I saw another set sold at Sotheby's many a year ago, when I was a lad, so——"

"Sir," answered Mr. Hellard, "I know your set is our set, because each coin bears a very tiny private mark upon it, which I myself placed there some years since. Sir, there is no doubt. Wonderful—wonderful!" exclaimed Mr. Hellard. "That mere accident should have taken me into that museum, and that——"

"Look here!" interrupted Mr. Paver-Crompton, rising and going to a cupboard in the recess of his encumbered library. "Have a glass of my old port and tell me all about this mystery. Was this set—if it is yours, which, of course, I'm not going to grant, you know, just yet—stolen, then?"

Mr. Hellard spread out his hands and shook his head.

"Heaven knows what happened!" he answered. He took the glass which his entertainer handed to him, sipped its contents, murmured his praise of the wine, and returned to the absorbing subject. "I'll tell you all about it," he went on. "You're aware, of course, that when Sarklestowe Castle was besieged by the Parliamentarians, in 1647, the Royalist garrison struck these siege coins in silver. There were three separate coins, each differently worded. They are now extremely scarce, especially in sets. I question if

there are four sets known to collectors; there are very few separate examples known. But our Corporation has always had, from the very first, and has most carefully treasured, the first set struck—the set which, I say, is down your street there. It was always carefully kept in a safe by our town clerk, for the time being—until some eleven years ago—and thereby hangs my tale!"

"Go on with it, my dear sir," commanded Mr. Paver-Crompton. "Deeply interesting."

"Eleven years ago," continued Mr. Hellard, "the town clerk of Sarklestowe was one Mr. Frank Marshfield. He was a smart, rather dashing young fellow, a member of my profession, of course, and of a few years' experience before he came to us. He did his work excellently; he was, in short, a model town clerk, and everybody thought a great deal of him. And then, all of a sudden, a most distressing and remarkable thing happened."

"Disappeared with some of the town's goods and effects, I suppose?" suggested Mr. Paver-Crompton with a grim chuckle.

"It was all very distressing—and most peculiar," answered Mr. Hellard. "The circumstances were queer—most queer. I don't know if you remember it, my dear sir, but just eleven years ago there was an exhibition in London of old Corporation plate. You bear it in mind? Very good. Now, to that exhibition we were invited to lend certain objects—our 14th century mace, our famous loving cup presented to us by Richard III., and one or two other unique and valuable objects. To these we voluntarily added our set of the siege coins—a very handsome exhibit altogether. And, in order to insure their perfect safety, it was arranged that Marshfield himself should take them up to London and hand them over in person. Upon a certain morning—to be precise it was the 7th of December, a very dark, foggy winter day, as I remember very well—Marshfield left his rooms in Spurgate, in our town, carrying his valuable articles in a hand bag, in order to catch the 9 o'clock express to London. He said good-bye to his landlady at her door; he

spoke to a couple of well-known townsfolk at the end of Spurgate; he was seen by another credible man of the town to turn the corner of Finkle Gate on his way to the station—and since that moment, my dear sir, Marshfield has never been seen or heard of! At any rate," added Mr. Hellard with great emphasis, "not by any Sarklestowe people—who would be uncommonly glad to either see or hear of him—uncommonly glad!"

"Ah!" observed Mr. Paver-Crompton knowingly. "Just so! Of course, there was something wrong?"

"I will continue this narrative in order," replied Mr. Hellard, sipping reflectively at his old port. "The course of events was in this wise: Mr. Alderman Mardill, chairman of our finance committee, was going up to town by that train, and had arranged with Marshfield that they should travel together. When Marshfield did not turn up at the station Mardill left a message for him with the station master, telling Marshfield where to meet him that evening in London—at some hotel or other, you know. Mardill, of course, thought that Marshfield had missed his train and would come on by the next. But the next went without Marshfield, and the afternoon one, too, and so the station master went up to the town to find him. And then, of course, the hue and cry began—and at the end of all these years Marshfield is still missing!"

"Never heard anything?" asked Mr. Paver-Crompton. "Literally anything!"

"Not a word, my dear sir!" answered Mr. Hellard. "The man who saw Marshfield turn the corner of Finkle Gate was the last person who ever set eyes on him in our town. He vanished. It's most remarkable. From Finkle Gate he had only to pass down the side of the castle and descend a flight of old stone stairs to the station. But nobody saw him. And the theory now is that he just went straight on to a low-lying part of the town, where the fog lay heavy that morning, made his way into the neighbouring woods and went clean away. Odd that no person saw him anywhere, but there were reasons for his flight."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Paver-Crompton with another grim chuckle. "I thought you'd come to that! Something wrong, of course?"

"Seriously wrong," admitted Mr. Hellard, shaking his head. "I'm afraid we were very, very lax at Sarklestowe in those days—we know much better now—and we allowed some of our officials, and notably our town clerk, far too much latitude. But, to cut matters short, we found that Marshfield had perpetrated serious defalcations. He had got hold of some valuable securities which have never been heard of since, and he had converted some others into cash. We also discovered that, making the most plausible and satisfactory excuses for doing so, he had been converting bank notes into gold at some of the banks in neighbouring towns. He must have had quite a quantity of gold—a thousand pounds' worth of gold, anyway, somewhere. So you understand why he vanished!"

"What I don't understand for one thing," remarked Mr. Paver-Crompton, "is this: You say he took some valuable securities which have never been heard of since. That implies that, wherever he got to, he never made use of them."

"Quite so," assented Mr. Hellard. "He never did. As a matter of fact we eventually regained our rights in them. But they were of such a nature that Marshfield, had he liked, could have converted them into cash in London as soon as he got there. There was nothing to stop him. And it's a marvellous thing that he didn't."

"Um!" remarked Mr. Paver-Crompton. "Well, you say he had the unique set of siege coins with him—my set?"

"He had," replied Mr. Hellard. "And I am positive, absolutely positive, that your set is our set. I tell you, my dear sir, I marked each coin in that set—I can show you the marks."

"Then through that set of siege coins you think you can trace something of this man?" asked Mr. Paver-Crompton, eyeing his visitor keenly.

Mr. Hellard threw up his hands.

"Oh, my dear sir," he said, "I wish you would tell me where, how, when you bought these coins!"

Mr. Paver-Crompton rose and rang the bell. He maintained a thoughtful silence until the trim parlour-maid appeared; then he spoke:

"Mary," said he, "get my usual portmanteau ready and have a cab called in half an hour. Now, my dear sir," he went on, when the girl had gone, "I will tell you what I will do. Your homeward way to your far-off northern town lies, of course, through London. I will go to London with you and take you to the man from whom I purchased that set of coins—and, by George, sir, I am so interested that I will stir heaven and earth to solve what's just as much a mystery to you as it is to me!"

At ten o'clock that night Mr. Paver-Crompton and Mr. Hellard arrived at Paddington. At ten o'clock next morning, arm in arm, they walked out of the Great Western Hotel and chartered a taxicab.

"Drive," commanded Mr. Paver-Crompton, "to the middle of Mortimer Street."

Mr. Hellard, a stranger to that part of middle London, looked round him with considerable curiosity when he and his companion left their vehicle and walked a little way along a street, which, to Mr. Hellard's eyes, seemed remarkably cosmopolitan. He was staring at the French names, the Italian names, the Jewish names, the antique shops, the old furniture and odds-and-ends shops, when Mr. Paver-Crompton touched his elbow and pointed him to a small brass plate very much in need of polish, which stood on the lintel of a shabby-looking door at the side of what was a tenement house. Upon this plate appeared the words: Mr. Issachar, Antiques.

"'Cutest man in London in his line," observed Mr. Paver-Crompton as he and his companion began to make their way up a very dirty staircase. "And, I always think, the biggest antique and curiosity in his collection. Never mind the grime and cobwebs, my dear sir—but take care of your neck coming down."

There was still a long way to climb. At its end Mr.

Paver-Crompton pushed open a door of what was evidently an attic, and ushered Mr. Hellard into the midst of an assemblage of venerable things which at any other moment would have completely absorbed his attention. But for that time his attention was at once concentrated on an old man, hook-nosed, skull-capped, long-bearded, who, clad in a nondescript garment, which covered him from head to foot, rose from a desk set in the midst of his accumulations and came forward with a deep bow.

"Well, Mr. Issachar," said Mr. Paver-Crompton cheerily, "here I am again, you see. But not to buy this time —merely to ask a little question. The fact is," he went on, tapping the old dealer's shoulder confidentially, "I want you to tell me something. You remember selling me that set of Sarklestowe siege coins and assuring me that you knew that they had recently been dug up in the neighbourhood of Sarklestowe Castle?"

"I assured you of what I myself was assured, sir," answered Mr. Issachar, who was rubbing his hands as he blinked at his visitors through a pair of big spectacles. "What I told you I should be told by the person from whom I bought."

"That's just it, sir," said Mr. Paver-Crompton. "Now, from whom did you buy? I'm particularly anxious to know. And—do you think the person who sold was a principal or an agent? It's important."

"An agent, sir," replied Mr. Issachar. "Otherwise I could not have imparted any information. I make it a strict rule never to divulge the names of principals in any of my transactions—it would be against my interests. But this man was certainly an agent."

"Ay, and who is he and where is he to be found?" demanded Mr. Paver-Crompton eagerly. "I want to find him at once."

"I only know him by a sort of nickname," answered the dealer. "He is known to our trade as Snuffy—Snuffy of Towler's Rents. I never knew him by any other name."

"Am I to hunt London for a man called Snuffy of Towler's Rents?" exclaimed Mr. Paver-Crompton. "Why——"

"Not at all sir," said Mr. Issachar. "Towler's Rents is a side street or alley, off Holborn; this man Snuffy keeps a curiosity shop there. You will easily find him. But," he added with a sly look, "whether you will get any information from him is another matter. And now, sir, allow me to draw your kind attention to this truly remarkable and interesting Louis Quatorze snuffbox, which——"

Mr. Paver-Crompton fled temptation—for that moment—and carefully piloted Mr. Hellard downstairs again and into another cab.

"Snuffy of Towler's Rents," he exclaimed as they sped along. "What a name, and probably what a place! And to think that such priceless antiquities pass through such hands and are haggled in such places."

Towler's Rents, duly arrived at, was certainly not the sort of locality in which the unthinking would expect to find objects of vertu. It was a narrow alley running out of Holborn in the direction of Bedford Row; there was just room in it for Mr. Paver-Crompton and Mr. Hellard to walk abreast; even then their elbows almost jostled the queer old windows of the dirty shops and half-wood house fronts on either side of them. One of the dirtiest of these windows contained some terribly dusty but good antiques, and Mr. Paver-Crompton paused and tried the door.

"This is our man, I'll be bound," he said. "And hang it all, the door's fast."

A slatternly woman looked out of the opposite house and caught Mr. Hellard's eye.

"'E ain't in," she said, "Never is in at this time o' day. But if yer wants to know where 'e is, 'e's in the Partridge and Pelican, up there—that pub. Goes in there every morning reg'lar for a drop o' rum."

The two searchers glanced at the exterior of the Partridge and Pelican and then at each other. It was not the

sort of place that broadcloth coats and silk hats could enter—without great loss of dignity.

"My very good woman," said Mr. Hellard, extracting a shilling from his pocket and dropping it gingerly into the ready hand extended to receive it, "we are in search of a person named Snuffy. If he is the man you refer to, will you have the goodness to fetch him to us? Tell him —er——"

"Tell him we want to see him about some of his old things," said Mr. Paver-Crompton.

The woman hurried towards the Partridge and Pelican and disappeared within one of its doors. And from the door presently emerged a man who was much more curious to look upon than Mr. Issachar—a tall, burly, paunchy man, whose bulk was tightly enveloped in a greasy fronted frock coat, the sleeves of which were much too short and the lapels of which were liberally ornamented with snuff, who was disreputable and unholy to look at, whose face was inflamed with spirits and whose eyes, small and pig-like, were crafty and suspicious. He rolled himself down the alley and touched the frayed brim of a doleful hat to the two strangers, whom he was evidently sizing up.

"Servant, gentleman," he said. "Is there ought I can have the pleasure of showing you this morning? Some nice Chippendale and extra good Sheraton——"

"You're a Yorkshireman," incautiously remarked Mr. Hellard, thrown off his mental guard. "I know that by your accent."

Snuffy, of Towler's Rents, turned as he opened his shop door, and he threw a not too pleased glance at the speaker.

"It's a long time since I saw Yorkshire," he growled. "And what if I am Yorkshire?"

"Oh, nothing, my friend!" answered Mr. Hellard, as they followed him into the shop. "I merely remarked that you were—I'm one myself, for that matter."

"And it's about a Yorkshire matter that we've come to see you," said Mr. Paver-Crompton. "Mr. Issachar

directed us to you. The fact is—and we'll make it worth your while to give any information you can—we want to know something, that you, no doubt, can tell us. Do you remember selling a set of Sarklestowe siege coins to Mr. Issachar of Mortimer Street some little time ago?"

Mr. Hellard, who was watching his fellow Yorkshireman's face with all the keenness of the legal observer, saw a faint twitch pass over Snuffy's unlovely features. He also saw a deepening of the gleam of suspicion which had been in the man's eyes ever since his North Country origin had been suggested to him. And when he replied, an added suspicion made itself manifest in his tones.

"Well, and what then?" he demanded.

"We want to know if you can tell us where, how and when you got those coins," answered Mr. Paver-Crompton. "And if you'll tell us, we'll give you——"

"Ahem," interrupted Mr. Hellard, with a deprecatory cough and a jog at his companion's elbow. "My dear sir —I—do not let us be in too much haste to offer pecuniary reward," he whispered. "Let us hear first if—eh?"

Snuffy, of Towler's Rents, had made no answer, and he betrayed no consciousness of Mr. Hellard's interruption. He rolled silently away amongst the litter of his untidy shop until he came to a desk in the corner, from which he extracted a dirty, much-thumbed ledger, the leaves of which he began to turn over with his claw-like fingers.

"Don't remember naught particular about 'em," he growled. "Might have summat set down here as would remind me. Siege coins, eh? How many of 'em now?"

"A set of three," replied Mr. Paver-Crompton. "Come now, you can't have forgotten a transaction like that! Why, you must know they're famous!"

Snuffy suddenly closed his book with a bang and looked up with a readiness which struck Mr. Hellard as being a piece of acting.

"Ay, I remember 'em now!" he exclaimed. "No, I don't know as they were famous—not so much in my line, you

know. If I had known it I'd ha' made that old Jew pay more for 'em."

"What did he pay you then?" asked Mr. Paver-Crompton, who knew very well what a substantial cheque he had drawn for Mr. Issachar in this transaction. "How much, now?"

But Snuffy eyed his questioner sourly and shook his head.

"That's my business—and his," he growled. " 'Tain' yours, mister. Well, now, where did I get 'em? How much are you going to give for the information?"

Mr. Paver-Crompton turned to his companion. And Mr. Hellard thought it time to assert himself. "I think we'd better speak plainly," he said. "I may as well tell you, my friend," he went on, addressing the old dealer, "that these coins were abstracted from the possession of the Sarklestowe Corporation, to which I am solicitor. I——"

"Ay, I thought you were summat o' that sort," interrupted Snuffy. "Ye look it! Well, but I know naught o' that. All I know is that them coins were brought to me and that I bought 'em. Gi' me a fiver and I'll tell you all I know."

"No," said Mr. Hellard, "certainly not!"

Snuffy threw his memorandum book into the open desk and banged the lid.

"Then I shall say naught and ye can get out o' my shop!" he said. "I've naught to do wit' t' matter."

"We'll see about that," said Mr. Hellard. "This is a serious affair and you'll be made to give evidence."

"My dear friend," whispered Mr. Paver-Crompton, who had his hand in his pocket. "Allow me!—a little judicious expenditure, you know——"

"Make it a couple o' quid, then," growled Snuffy. "Not a ha'penny less!"

Mr. Hellard protested, but there was an exchange of coins between his companion and the old dealer, who pocketed his gains and sneered openly at the solicitor.

"Well," he said, "all I can tell you is this here—

them coins was brought to me at a time when I had a dish full o' such like things in the window. A chap brought 'em and wanted to know if I'd buy 'em. So I bought 'em. And that's all!"

He grinned maliciously at Mr. Hellard, but Mr. Hellard shook his head.

"No," he said, "you know a lot more than that, my friend. Who was this man? What was his name?"

"D'ye think I ask my customers' names?" roared Snuffy. "Know naught about the man's name."

"What sort of man was he, at any rate?" persisted Mr. Hellard. "You know that!"

"Working sort o' fellow—gardener or summat o' that sort," growled the old man. "Said he were up in London on a holiday and that he'd dug them coins up in an orchard. Now then!"

"Where?" demanded Mr. Hellard. "At Sarklestowe?"

"Where else?" retorted Snuffy. "And that's all I know. And now away wi' you both, 'cause that's all I know and I want to lock up and go to my dinner. Ye'll get no more out of me!"

Mr. Hellard touched his companion's arm and they withdrew into Towler's Rents and went away talking in confidential whispers. As for the old man they left behind them, he watched their disappearing figures until they had merged with the crowds in Holborn. Then he locked the shop door, rolled swiftly into Holborn himself, looked up and down, saw his two visitors cross the street and walk slowly westward, whereupon, with a grim chuckle, he turned away and made for the nearest telegraph office.

Mr. Hellard and Mr. Paver-Crompton went along in deep confabulation. Now and then so engrossed were they that they mutually paused, to the annoyance of other passengers on the sidewalk, who first ran into and then grabbed at them.

"This will never do," said Mr. Hellard, when a man carrying a heavy parcel had cursed them openly; "we are making ourselves a public nuisance." He looked up and around and noticed the Holborn Restaurant. "Let us

go in there," he said. "It is almost time for lunch and we can sit down and converse quietly. My dear sir," he went on, when they had found a quiet corner and ordered their chops, "that man, I am confident, is deceiving us. He knows much more than he told us. And—most significant—he's a Yorkshireman."

"Why significant?" asked Mr. Paver-Crompton.

"Isn't Sarklestowe in Yorkshire?" replied Mr. Hellard. "Ah, my dear sir, as soon as I heard that man's voice I began to suspect something. How do we know that he hasn't had dealing with someone in Sarklestowe—that he isn't in touch with someone there—hasn't been there himself of late years? Certainly, I don't remember ever seeing the man there, but, small town as it is, he might have been there without my knowledge. I wish I knew that man's name."

"That ought not to be a difficult matter to discover," observed Mr. Paver-Crompton, with a commendable touch of worldly wisdom. "He lives in Towler's Rents. He's a furniture dealer. Surely his name will be in a trades directory. They'll have such a thing here—waiter!"

The waiter presently produced a London street directory, and Mr. Paver-Crompton, adjusting his glasses, began to turn over its pages. Before long he clapped his finger to an entry.

"There you are, that'll be the man—only furniture and curiosity shop in Towler's Rents, d'you see?" he exclaimed. "Thomas Capstick."

Mr. Hellard, who was bending eagerly forward from the other side of the small table at which the two gentlemen sat, jumped up with such energy that the waiter, standing directly near, was obliged to spring forward to save the glass and china.

"Capstick!" exclaimed Mr. Hellard. "Capstick! You don't meant it! Capstick! Heaven bless my heart and soul. My dear sir, we must go to Sarklestowe at once—this instant!"

"No, a bit later," promptly responded Mr. Paver-

Crompton. "The chops first, I think, my good friend. Now, why this eagerness?"

Mr. Hellard gave one more glance at the directory and relapsed into his chair again.

"Capstick! by all that's wonderful!" he groaned. "Capstick! Why, that's the name of the woman who acts as caretaker of Sarklestowe Castle. She lives in the old Barbican—ruined, of course. She has rooms in it. My dear sir, this Snuffy individual must be her relation."

"I daresay we're getting at something," said Mr. Paver-Crompton. "And since we've learned this much, we'll go around to Towler's Rents and see the old sinner again. Then you must plump him straight out with two questions: Is the woman at Sarklestowe Castle his relative? Did he get these siege coins from her? That'll be a stage further. In the meantime—waiter, hand me your wine list."

Fortified in body and more alert than ever in mind, Mr. Hellard and Mr. Paver-Crompton retraced their steps to Towler's Rents, but the dirty and frowsy shop was securely locked up and Thomas Capstick was not to be seen. Once more the woman who lived opposite thrust herself out of her doorway.

"'E's gone awye, has old Snuffy," she said. "'E come back soon after you was gone down the Rents and he set off hisself wiv a bag and 'e said to me, 'e said as 'ow he was going to the country on business and if anybody came a-wanting of 'im 'e'd be awye a week or more. Which 'e often goes awye like that."

The searchers after Snuffy of Towler's Rents went away into Holborn again, took a cab and drove back to their hotel.

"The question is," said Mr. Hellard meditatively, as they drove along—"the question is, has that old scoundrel—for I am convinced that he is an old scoundrel—set off for Sarklestowe?"

Mr. Paver-Crompton chuckled.

"No, no, my good friend!" he said. "Pardon me, that is not the question. The immediate question is what

time can we ourselves get a train to your historic town? For what we want to do now—knowing what we do—is to betake ourselves to Sarklestowe as quickly as steam can propel us."

"You mean to see Mary Anne Capstick?" asked Mr. Hellard.

"Mary Anne, or Mary Jane, certainly," assented Mr. Paver-Crompton. "She is, in my opinion, the next link."

"Soon answer that question," said Mr. Hellard. "There's a splendid train from King's Cross at three-fifteen."

"Then we'll catch it and get down there," responded Mr. Paver-Crompton. "For there I am sure is the source of the stream we are trying to trace."

Eight o'clock that evening saw Mr. Hellard and his companion breathing the keen air of the wind-swept moorlands, over which the great Norman keep of Sarklestowe Castle still stands watch. They glanced at its mighty bulk as they walked through the darkness towards it.

"I suppose we'd better go straight to the Barbican?" asked Mr. Hellard. "A direct question unexpectedly put, eh?"

"Excellent!" agreed Mr. Paver-Crompton, "and if I may suggest what the question should be, I should advise you as soon as this woman opens the door to us to plump her with a plain inquiry, devoid of any preface, such as, 'Now, Mrs. Capstick, do you know of one Thomas Capstick, of Towler's Rents, in London?"

"Good!" murmured Mr. Hellard, "I will."

But for the second time since noon Mr. Hellard and his companion found a door locked against them. The old Barbican, transformed into a dwelling-house of two or three rooms, was in darkness; not a gleam of candle or of fire came through its diamond-pane windows. Mr. Hellard thumped loudly at the door; no answer came. But the door of a cottage close by presently opened and a man came out.

"John Green—a worthy fellow!" whispered Mr. Hellard, advancing towards the man. "Good evening, John,

do you know where Mrs. Capstick is? She hasn't gone to bed at this hour, surely?"

John Green turned and looked back into the cottage, calling to his wife. That good woman came bustling out.

"Oh, it's Mestur Hellard, is it?" she said in broad Yorkshire. "Why, sir, Missis Capstick, she went away this forenoon. She's gone to Kettleby to see their 'Lizer —she's badly. She went at eleven o'clock did Mrs. Capstick, to catch t' train, and about two hours after she were gone, there wor a tallygraft come for her—t' tallygraft lad left it wi' me. An' as she'd left her door key wi' me I put t' tallygraft on her table—I thowt, happen, it wor to say their Lizer wor dead. But, of course, I don't know."

"Oh, she left her key with you, did she?" remarked Mr. Hellard, nudging his companion in the darkness. "Well, now, there's something I want out of the Barbican house, so just give me that key, will you, Mrs. Green? By the bye, did Mrs. Capstick say whether she'd return to-night?"

Mrs. Green stepped back within her cottage, took down a key from a nail and handed it over.

"She said she might, and she might not, sir," she replied. "It all depended on how their 'Lizer wor. If she found her right bad, she said she'd stop all t' night there."

Mr. Hellard opened Mrs. Capstick's door, let his visitor within, closed the door and struck a match. A candle stood in its stick on the centre of the table in the little room they had entered, and close by lay the buff envelope of the telegram. Mr. Hellard looked at it and then at Mr. Paver-Crompton.

"My dear sir," he murmured, with the half sinister expression of the conspirator, "I—the fact is, I'm going to open that telegram!"

Mr. Paver-Crompton nodded acquiescence.

"Precisely what I should do myself, under the circumstances," he said, "for in my opinion that wire is not from 'Lizer, but from London!"

Mr. Hellard's fingers trembled a little as he slowly opened the buff envelope. He gave one quick glance at the message, and then, with something between a groan and an exclamation of relief, handed the flimsy paper to his companion.

"You're right," he said. "It is from London, and from that hoary old trickster."

Mr. Paver-Crompton slowly read out the message:

"Mrs. Capstick, Barbican Cottage, Sarklestowe: Hellard here this morning. You had better go away at once.—Cousin Tom."

"Handed in at twelve-fifty," said Mr. Paver-Crompton musingly. "Just after we left him, eh? But the woman across there said that Mrs. Capstick went away at eleven, and never got this wire?"

"A fortunate circumstance," remarked Mr. Hellard. "She'll come back—all unsuspecting. Well, my dear sir, what do you think?"

"Plain enough," replied Mr. Paver-Crompton. "There's no doubt whatever that the man Snuffy got those coins from this woman. But—where did she get them? And what does she know about—Marshfield?"

For a moment the two gentlemen stared at each other, a question in the eyes of each. A heavy step outside startled them, and Mr. Hellard tip-toed to the door and cautiously looked out.

"One of our constables," he whispered. "A thoroughly reliable man—we'll have him in; he may be useful."

The policeman duly summoned into the cottage, stared at Mr. Hellard with amazed eyes.

"Anything wrong, sir?" he asked, looking from one to the other, and then glancing round as if he missed something. "Aught about Mother Capstick?"

"There may be a good deal wrong, Johnson," answered Mr. Hellard gravely. "We don't know yet," he turned to Mr. Paver-Crompton. "Would it be any good to make a sort of preliminary search now?" he suggested. "There might be some indication——"

Mr. Paver-Crompton shook his head. He was about to express the opinion that measures of that sort would not be of much use at that stage, when the policeman, who had sharp ears, turned to the door, looked out, and closed it again.

"There's Mrs. Capstick a-coming along now," he said. "She's close at hand, sir."

Mr. Hellard's strategy developed itself.

"Stand back there, Paver-Crompton," he said sharply. "Get into that corner, Johnson—put yourself behind the door. Get between her and the door, once she enters. Now then."

A moment of breathless suspense; then the door was pushed open, and a big, elderly, raw-boned woman entered; behind her appeared the wondering faces of Green and his wife. It seemed to the watchers, from a strong scent of spirits which came in with her, that Mrs. Capstick had been drinking a little, and the eye which she turned on Mr. Hellard was distinctly fiery and aggressive.

"Now then, Mr. Hellard," she demanded loudly, "what right have you to get my key and walk into my house, I would like to know? Poor folks' houses is as good as rich folks', and I'll not be put on by you nor nobody, let me tell you that, Mr. Hellard! What right——"

At that moment Mrs. Capstick's eloquence was cut short by a sight of the policeman, who, at a signal from Mr. Hellard waved the Greens away, shut the door, and placed himself against it. Mrs. Capstick suddenly caught her breath, glanced from one to the other of her visitors, and collapsed into a chair.

"Oh, what is it?" she exclaimed, with a curious drop from the indignant to the frightened. "What——"

"Now, Mrs. Capstick," said Mr. Hellard firmly, "you've got to tell the truth. We know more than you think. Come, now, where did you get those things you sold to your cousin, Thomas Capstick, in London? Out with it, now."

It was a shot made at a venture, but the watchers saw

that it went home. And Mr. Hellard drove it further in by waving the telegram.

"Come, now," he went on, in his sternest manner. "It's useless to keep anything back. You got those things —and more—from Mr. Marshfield years ago! Tell the truth about it—and about him. You've got a secret, and we'll have it out of you, if we have to pull every stone and stick of this old Barbican to pieces! So come on!"

Mrs. Capstick had begun to moan and sob, rocking herself to and fro in the chair into which she had dropped. Her eye went to a black bottle which stood flanked by a glass on a chiffonier.

"For mercy's sake gi' me a taste o' that!" she moaned. "I'm fair upset, and my heart's bad! Gi' me a drop, you Johnson, and I'll tell you the truth, gentlemen, and be done with it—it's been a sore weight this many a year."

"Give her what she wants," commanded Mr. Hellard. He watched his prisoner sip and sip again, until the colour came back into her cheeks.

"Now, then, no nonsense," he said. "Tell me the whole truth."

Mrs. Capstick untied the strings of her bonnet and sighed deeply.

"I've allus been afraid it 'ud come out," she moaned. "I allus said so to Cousin Thomas, but he would have it 'at it were a safe thing. Well, it's like this, Mr. Hellard. It were when Marshfield, as you've just mentioned, disappeared. It was a very foggy morning, that—which made it all t' easier what happened. My Cousin Thomas were stopping a few days wi' me, and him and me had just finished our breakfasts, when there came a tap at the door, and it opened, and Marshfield looked in—that white and queer i' face 'at we jumped to our feet. 'For heaven's sake, Mrs. Capstick,' he says 'let me sit down a minute and get me summat—I'm overcome,' he says. 'I've been hurryin' to t' station, and my heart's affected—I'm done,' he says. An' he staggered in, dropping a bag 'at he carried, and then fell into that theer chair. An' I rushed one way for summat, and my Cousin Thomas he rushed

for a drop of sperrits 'at were in that cupboard, but afore we could do owt, Marshfield he gev' a queer groan and he went."

"Died!" exclaimed Mr. Hellard.

"He was dead as a doornail when we touched him," solemnly asserted Mrs. Capstick. "May I never bite nor sup again if he worn't dead! We knew that as soon as we touched his hand. And, of course, I were for running for help and a doctor. But as you know, Mr. Hellard, there wasn't a house nor a cottage near the old place at that time—they've all been built since—so there was no neighbours to call. And Thomas, he stopped me. 'Doctors is no use for dead men,' he says. 'Bide a bit and let me see what he has in that theer bag.' And, of course, Thomas did what he pleased. He opened t' bag, and theer was a lot o' gold money in it, and some papers, and them Corporation things 'at were afterwards reported as missing. And when he saw that, my Cousin Thomas fastened t' door and made me help him to carry t' body into that inner room theer. And later on in t' day he went out and made some inquiry in t' town, cautious like, you know, Mr. Hellard, and he came back and said to me 'at nobody 'ud never know aught about it, for theer weren't a soul i' t' place 'at had any idea 'at Marshfield had ever come near t' Barbican, and they were already saying 'at he'd fled t' town altogether. And so—well, we agreed 'at we'd stick to t' gold for ourselves. Thomas, he took charge of it, and carried it away to London wi' him and t' rest o' t' things, too—all excepting some papers 'at were in t' bag. An' them papers——"

Mrs. Capstick paused and looked fearfully at her audience.

"Them papers," she went on at last in a hushed voice, "is wi' t' body. And t' body's safe buried in one o' t' owd cellars down t' bottom o' them stairs. An' Lord ha' mercy, I've thowt many a time 'at I heerd Marshfield walking up them stairs i' t' dead o' night, but I knew it wor fancy. 'cause we niver laid a finger on him. An'—that's all. Mr. Hellard—what about my Cousin Thomas?"

Mr. Hellard looked grimly at his two companions before he turned to Mrs. Capstick.

"I hope we shall get your Cousin Thomas as easily as we've got you, my woman," he answered. "Bring Mrs. Capstick up to the police station, Johnson, and we'll get to work."

FREDERIC ARNOLD KUMMER

PIGS' FEET

When Harvey Thorpe came to the Central Trust as assistant collateral clerk there were many among the company's employes who did not like him. In part this resulted from the personality of the man himself. Reserved, silent, not given to discussing his affairs with anyone, he was looked upon with suspicion, as silent men so frequently are, on the popular theory that only gabblers have nothing to conceal. Conversely, the office argued, Mr. Thorpe must have a great deal to conceal, since he said so little.

Courteous he invariably was, with a fleeting, whimsical smile which, though agreeable enough, still was sufficiently impersonal to hold the world at arm's length. He sat in his steel cage all day, cool, well poised, efficient, apparently quite oblivious to the fact that he was the most discussed man in the office. When the working day was over he quietly effaced himself, vanished, without telling anyone where he lived, what he did with himself in his leisure hours, without discussing the baseball scores, without, in fact, discussing anything whatever. All of which inevitably made him a man of mystery.

Any open discussion of Mr. Thorpe's affairs was precluded by the fact that Mr. McMillan himself, the Central's martinet of a president, had brought the young man from New York to fill poor old Mack Carver's place when the latter was forced, by reason of a nervous breakdown, to take an indefinite leave of absence. Why had not Tommy Bland been given the position? the office force argued. He was next in line for promotion. Why bring in this stranger from New York? Kitty Grayson, who was

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Mr. Hood's secretary and the acknowledged office vamp, thought his eyes like Valentino's until her efforts to make him take some notice of her met with utter failure. After that she turned up her nose at him and indulged in vague suggestions that he was probably leading a dark and double life.

Mr. Thorpe, however, was not so indifferent to his surroundings as those in his little world supposed. There was a view, through the bars at the left-hand corner of his cage, to which he was not indifferent at all. It consisted of a small railed-in inclosure surrounding a glass-and-mahogany door.

Not that Mr. Thorpe was particularly interested in railed inclosures or mahogany doors, even though behind the one in question sat the Central's august president himself; and he certainly would not have risked getting a crick in his neck so many times a day had it not been for the presence in that railed inclosure of a far more important personage—to wit, the president's secretary, Miss Virginia Tabb.

Sometimes the view that met Mr. Thorpe's kindling eyes was a deliciously white and rounded neck, against which clustered soft chestnut curls, like wreaths of smoke. No landscape in the world, however famous, Mr. Thorpe decided, could possibly equal it in beauty. Talk of your Lake Comos, your snow-capped Alps! Bah! See America first—Young America, as exemplified by the person of Miss Virginia Tabb.

Another view, and one in which Mr. Thorpe took particular delight, was a profile composed of half a gracious forehead framed in warm dark hair, one lovely eyebrow, arched and slender as the nascent moon, a nose provokingly *retroussé*, and two inviting scarlet lips parted just sufficiently to disclose a line of polished white. When Mr. Thorpe's vagrant gaze reached the swelling throat, the budding tenderness beneath, he was ready to declare that no view this side of Paradise—or the other for that matter—could possibly surpass it. If Mr. Thorpe's business associates could have guessed the thoughts which

flitted through that young man's darkly handsome head it would have surprised them considerably.

And not in this matter alone would Mr. Thorpe's mental processes have surprised those about him. When not dreaming of the charms of Miss Virginia Tabb that young man devoted much time to thoughts of money. It was perhaps but natural to one situated as he was. The sight of green and yellow notes stacked up in bales like so many bricks, of rolls of coins slipping through the nimble fingers of the paying teller in gold and silver streams, of bundles of securities, gilt-edged stocks and bonds, representing millions, of fortunes in thousand-dollar bills, capable of being carried in one's vest pocket—such things inevitably induce in the mind of the beholder a certain carelessness so far as money is concerned, a familiarity breeding contempt. So much money in the world, ready to be grasped by the eager fingers of the shrewd, the clever, the unscrupulous. As Harvey Thorpe contemplated the endless stream of securities which passed through his hands on their way to the steel-and-concrete vaults in the basement beneath, his cool smile became cooler still, and there was a frosty gleam in his eyes which, had those about him seen it, would have justified them in the belief that he was not only mysterious but dangerous as well. It was a very different look from that which rested on his face when contemplating the perfections of Miss Virginia Tabb.

It is a singular fact that, although Harvey Thorpe had been with the Central close to three months, he had never once ventured to express his feelings toward the object of his adoration in words. They met from time to time during the course of the business day; they greeted each other with the usual official politeness; they even chatted, on occasion, over unimportant trifles; but in spite of the ardent emotions that filled his breast, Mr. Thorpe did not ask permission to call; nor did Miss Tabb, much as she would have liked to do so, ever suggest it. Once or twice she timed her departure from the office to conform with his, in the hope that he might

offer to escort her home; but the results were discouraging—a smile, a bow, a pleasant good afternoon, and the young man went on his solitary way. It puzzled her greatly, because she was fully aware of the admiring glances sent in her direction so often during the day—had, in fact, reciprocated them when the object of her attentions was not looking. Why, she asked herself over and over, did Thorpe keep so persistently within his shell?

There was a reason for it, of course; but it remained securely locked in that young gentleman's very self-contained breast. Even had he realized that his feelings were reciprocated, that Virgina, too, was worshiping from afar, he would not have altered his course. Harvey Thorpe had come to the Central Trust Company for a very definite purpose, and one which had nothing to do with either his advancement in the banking business or the making of love to young women secretaries, however charming and desirable they might be; and that purpose he meant to carry out in spite of any attractions to the contrary. But it is nevertheless true that he often pictured to himself, during the course of the day, a certain rustic bench overlooking a lake drenched with moonlight, upon which bench, in his imagination, he was seated with Miss Tabb.

"Virginia," he fancied himself saying, "I love you. Will you be my wife?"

Then the imagined reply: "Yes, Harvey. I love you, too," followed by an ecstasy of silence, her head against his breast.

Such dreams served to relieve the monotony of an existence made up almost entirely of promissory notes and stocks and bonds.

II

"Benton," said Harvey Thorpe, gazing across the table at his companion with rather somber eyes, "what do you know about Sam Rossman?"

"Rossman? Why, only that he's the most celebrated criminal lawyer in the state. I thought everybody knew that. Not thinking of consulting him, are you?"

Jim Benton swept the wisp of tow-colored hair from his forehead with a characteristic gesture.

"Because if you are——"

"Never mind the comedy," Thorpe interrupted. "I'm in earnest."

"So am I. Whenever you get tired of working in the bank and decide to grab off a bale of thousand-dollar smackers for yourself don't try to run for it. All the successful crooks nowadays stay at home and hire a good lawyer. I tell you, Thorpe"—he gave a cynical laugh—"men of Sam Rossman's type—big criminal lawyers—are the most pernicious influence in our public life today."

Harvey Thorpe's eyes grew even more somber. His lips were set in hard, narrow lines.

"Tell me some more," he said. "As a newspaper man, you ought to have a lot of inside dope."

"I have," Benton laughed; "but what do you want with it?"

"Never mind about that now. Just what is Rossman besides being a brilliant and able lawyer?"

"He's a crook; a pig, with his feet in the public trough. Landed here a Polish boy twenty years ago without a ruble in his pocket. Worth a million today. Brains? Hot dog! Wish I had his headpiece! I wouldn't be wasting my sweetness in a newspaper office. There's hardly a lawyer in town who isn't afraid of him, with his savage humor, his biting tongue. He makes monkeys of them in court, and they hate him accordingly. The crowd thinks he's a wonder, and he is, too, in a way. Even got himself elected to Congress a few years ago, although"—Benton laughed with his usual cynicism—"I don't know that that proves anything."

"How did he make his money? Practicing law?"

"That's the question. He gets big fees, of course. Has an enormous practice—bootleggers, burglars, gamblers,

crooked politicians, murderers—you'll find them all in his office, and they all swear by him. In the underworld he's the snake's antlers, boy, believe me; and hand in glove with the political bosses, of course. The two things go together everywhere, although the innocent taxpayer never seems to get it through his ivory dome. They say he's made quite a clean-up in the rum trade recently, but he's too slick to let anybody get anything on him. Smooth as a greased eel. The Star's been after his scalp for quite a while."

"Why?"

"Well, why not? For one reason because, as I've just told you, men of Sam Rossman's type are rapidly becoming a serious menace to the health of the community. You know—every thinking man knows—that since the war respect for the law has gone by the board. Seems as though everybody was figuring, not how to obey the laws but how to break them. All along the line, from the big grafters who steal millions down to the little fellows who try to dodge a fifty-dollar income tax. That's where the criminal lawyer comes in. Shows his clients how to keep outside the law, or, if they happen to make a slip, how to escape it. Take Rossman. His influence is enormous. He can pull a hundred wires—venal judges, crooked police officials, packed juries, perjured witnesses, threats from all sorts of underworld sources—to say nothing of his ability as a lawyer. Why, he's built up a regular machine in the interests of crime. Spies and snoopers and scouts in every police station, magistrate's office and court room in town. Officials, I mean, in his pay. He knows the political connections, the financial resources, the religious beliefs of every man summoned for jury duty before he even gets to the court room. If a burglary or a shooting or a hold-up takes place he'll hear about it as soon as the police department does; sooner sometimes—the thing may have been planned in his office. And to look at him you'd think he was a butter-and-egg salesman, or something of the sort. A man of simple tastes, never drinks or plays around, devoted to his wife and family, and thinks noth-

ing of putting in eighteen hours of work a day. That's Rossman. Anything else you'd like to know?"

Harvey Thorpe ground the stub of his cigarette in the ash tray.

"Didn't he defend a man named Hoffner last summer?"

"Yes; fellow who shot Wilmer Tabb. Why?"

"Nothing; only his sister, Virginia Tabb, happens to work at our shop. Secretary to the president, Old Man McMillan."

"Is that so? Never met her. But I knew Wilmer well. He was on the Star. Fine boy. Everybody liked him. And Rossman, you know, got Hoffner off."

"I don't know. That was before I came to your charming burg. Tell me about it."

"Well, it was a bootleggers' row to start with. Some Western crook—the Denver Kid they called him—blew into town and started operations by knocking off a few cases of hooch here and there as the stuff was being delivered. The Kid worked alone, and the local booties didn't pay much attention to him at first; but when he held up a truckload of case goods worth twenty thousand and got away with it single-handed the Big Guy decided to have him bumped off."

"The Big Guy?"

"Yes; Tom Casey. Runs a saloon on Hilton Street, and controls every gallon of bootleg stuff that's sold in town. A big, cool Irishman, with X-ray eyes and a cast-steel conscience. He and Sam Rossman are great pals.

"Casey decided it wouldn't be wise to have this Denver boy bumped off by any of the local talent, because all his regular gunmen are known to the police; so he sends to New York and gets a wop named Joe Scarlatti to do the job. I'm told Scarlatti's figure was two hundred and expenses. Yes, you can buy a murder, same as you can anything else, if you know where to look for it.

"This Scarlatti, it seems, takes a couple of shots of snow on the night of the killing to brace himself up, and shoots the wrong man. It would be funny if it weren't tragic. Hoffner, who is one of Casey's right-hand men,

pilots the dago to a joint on the outskirts of town where the Denver Kid is eating supper with a jane, and points him out; but the room is so full of cigarette smoke and Scarlatti is so full of coke that he shoots wild, and poor Wilmer Tabb, who is out gathering some underworld dope for a Sunday story, gets a bullet through his head. Happened to be right in the line of fire. Scarlatti got away, but they caught Hoffner and the grand jury indicted him for murder.

"If the fellow from Denver had been shot there wouldn't have been any trouble; one crook less for the police to bother about. But here was a young fellow of good family shot down in cold blood. The newspapers rode the police department ragged.

"Well, to make a long story short, Sam Rossman, with perjured witnesses, a packed jury and a lot of money, got Hoffner acquitted.

"Actually proved an alibi, when there were a dozen men and women, crooks mostly, sitting in the room who saw Hoffner come to the doorway with Scarlatti and point out his man. But you can bet your boots none of them dared say so.

"Rossman got Hoffner off because he had to. He knew that if he didn't the rat would probably squeal and put the murder up to Big Tom Casey, where it belonged. They say that Casey paid him a fee of fifty thousand dollars, but that may be exaggerated. I tell you, Thorpe, men like Rossman are more dangerous to the community than a thousand ordinary crooks. They're supercriminals."

"I guess you're right," Thorpe said with a slow, unhumorous smile; "but if a fellow happened to be in trouble I should think Rossman might be a very handy person to know."

"Rather!" Benton replied, peering at his companion over his glasses.

It seemed to him that there was something queer about Harvey Thorpe; he wondered why Graham, of the Bulletin, had introduced him at the club.

III

Mr. Samuel Rossman looked up from the document he had been reading and bent his keen eyes upon the caller his secretary had just ushered in. They were smiling eyes, too; but behind that ready smile lay a brain as cold, a will as inflexible, as a piece of tool steel.

"What can I do for you?" he asked, sweeping the young man before him with a glance having the searching qualities of a vacuum cleaner. Beneath it his visitor seemed nervous, ill at ease.

"My name is Harvey Thorpe," the latter said. "I am employed at the Central Trust Company."

"So I see from your card." Mr. Rossman glanced at the bit of pasteboard his secretary had handed him. "What do you want? I am very busy?"

"I want your advice in a legal matter."

"Who sent you to me?"

"No one. I came because you are reputed to be the most able criminal lawyer in the state."

Mr. Rossman puffed thoughtfully on his cigar. It was a fat cigar and somewhat oily looking; which was appropriate enough, since Mr. Rossman, in spite of his too-well-groomed exterior, was fat and somewhat oily looking himself. His body, his face, his lips, even his smile, all possessed that singular quality of oily fatness.

"State the nature of your business, please," he said.

"I'm in trouble," Mr. Thorpe replied, and sank into a chair.

"What sort of trouble?"

"Before I tell you, will you promise to keep it to yourself?"

"It isn't necessary," the lawyer said coldly. "Confidences made by clients are always sacred. Explain your case. If I decide to take it I will ask you for a retainer; if not, I will tell you so, and that will be the end of the matter so far as I am concerned. But be brief."

The young man before him, though well enough dressed, did not impress him as being overprosperous.

"Well," Mr. Thorpe blurted out, "to tell you the truth, I've taken some of the company's money and I want you to help me. I can't pay much of a retainer, but if a hundred dollars will do to start with——"

He drew a yellow-backed bill from his waistcoat pocket and placed it on the desk. The lawyer glanced at it, but made no comment. Mr. Thorpe hurried on:

"It wasn't much at first—only a five-hundred-dollar Liberty Bond, one of several attached as collateral to a note. In my capacity as assistant note teller I was able to remove the bond from the envelope in which the note and other securities were contained before it was placed in the vaults."

Mr. Rossman nodded without speaking. Among his intimates he was sometimes referred to as Silent Sam.

"Then I took some more. I'd been speculating, you see, and the market went against me. French bonds this time—unregistered. I never took any that weren't. Now I'm in for ten thousand dollars, and no way to make the amount good. The bank examiners are due any day, and that means discovery, of course. What am I going to do?"

"Why ask me?" Mr. Rossman inquired frostily. "If you can't make good you'll have to go to jail."

"But"—the young man made a gesture of despair—"I can't do that. I won't!"

"How do you expect to prevent it?"

"I thought you might figure out some way to get me off."

"Humph!" Mr. Rossman gave a fat and sarcastic grunt. "You're wasting your time, young fellow, and mine, too."

He shifted about in his chair so that his caller could see but one heavy fat shoulder.

"Very well"—Mr. Thorpe picked up his hundred-dollar bill and rose, a gleam of desperation in his eye—"if you won't help me I'll help myself. I'll take a lot more and beat it. Might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb."

He went quickly toward the door. Mr. Rossman's head revolved slowly, as though on a well-oiled pivot. Little sparks, luminous yet cold, danced in his eyes.

"Wait a moment," he said softly. "I'd like to ask you a few questions."

"What questions?" Mr. Thorpe hung uncertainly at the door.

"Sit down." The lawyer waved a fat hand, then allowed his gaze to wander speculatively about the room. It possessed no distinctive features, except that, being situated at one end of a long and narrow suite, with windows on two sides and a blank wall on the third, Mr. Rossman's private office was strictly private. Conversations carried on within it were as messages written in sand. He focused his eyes on Mr. Thorpe's troubled face. "You're bonded, of course?"

"Yes; for ten thousand. The bank wouldn't lose anything, but what I want is to keep out of jail."

"How did you dispose of the securities you took?"

"I deposited them with my brokers, Cook & Langley, as margins for the stocks I held. When I was wiped out they were sold to make my account good. Here's the last statement they sent me."

He took a sheet of paper from his pocket and laid it on the desk.

"The bonds were unregistered, you say?" the lawyer asked, glancing at it. "Couldn't they be traced by their numbers?"

"They might if the record of those numbers was correct. It is part of my duties at the bank to keep that record, and I saw to it that it wasn't."

The luminous points in Mr. Rossman's eyes became brighter. He leaned across the desk.

"You say you are going back and take some more?" he whispered.

"I did say that," Mr. Thorpe admitted; "but——"

"How much more do you think you could get?"

"Why, I don't know. Twenty-five thousand—fifty, maybe." Mr. Thorpe's face showed his surprise.

"Then, young man," the lawyer continued in tones barely audible across the desk, "my advice to you is this:

Go back and take all you can get hold of. Then come to me and I'll see what I can do for you."

He swung around in his chair and picked up the document he had been reading.

"But——" Mr. Thorpe began.

"That's all. If you come bring the bonds with you—and don't forget to change the numbers."

Harvey Thorpe started to speak, thought better of it and went out, his jaws set in hard, unpleasant lines.

IV

It was fate, and not any intention on Mr. Thorpe's part, that caused him to escort Virginia Tabb home that afternoon—Fate, in the form of a dismal fall of rain. He found the girl poised rather ruefully beneath the trust company's Grecian portico, restrained from venturing into the swimming streets by the hope of a cessation in the downpour. He had almost passed her, when he suddenly realized her predicament.

"Miss Tabb," he stammered, "I—you haven't any umbrella. Can't I put you on your car?"

She smiled in a way that set his blood dancing. For the moment he forgot the reasons that had kept him so aloof from her, from everyone else in the office, and remembered only the bench in the moonlight, the imagined conversation upon it.

"Thanks, Mr. Thorpe," he heard her say. "You're awfully kind. It's only two blocks up, at the corner of Commerce Street." She pointed a toe toward the sidewalk.

Harvey Thorpe looked at the toe, at the fragile suède which covered it, the slender shimmer of silk above. Then his glance wandered to the street, ankle deep along the curb. A taxicab splashed wetly up, spurting fountains of spray. He signaled it, raised his umbrella.

"I'm going to take you home," he said. "Where shall I tell him to drive?"

Miss Tabb supplied the number. In the darkness her eyes were very gay, but Mr. Thorpe was not aware of it. He was gazing out of the window. The suddenly lighted street lamps made long shimmering trails of gold on the wet pavements; they reminded him of the imagined moonlight on his imagined lake.

"I—I'm glad of this opportunity to talk to you, Miss Tabb," he said presently.

The remark struck him at once as being particularly asinine, since up to now he had not uttered a word.

"I'm glad, too. I thought—well, what I mean to say is you have always seemed so—so sort of distant."

"Did you think I didn't want to talk to you?" he asked, remembering his daily adoration.

"Why, naturally. They say"—she gave a little laugh, like silver bells—"they say at the office that you must have had some terrible sorrow in your life, to make you so—well, so unapproachable."

Mr. Thorpe made no reply to this. He was thinking of the interview he had had with Mr. Rossman so short a time before.

"In fact," Miss Tabb went on, "they consider you quite a mystery."

Harvey Thorpe's face clouded. He was far from happy.

"What do you think?" he asked.

"Why, it seemed to me natural that you should be the way you were, coming to a strange city, with strange people and all. I suppose lots of times you wish you were home."

"Home?" He looked at her with a curious gravity, his voice almost plaintively serious. "I haven't any home in the way you mean. No people, that is. I come from New York, but I wasn't born there."

"Then I hope you will like this slow old town well enough to make your home here. It isn't such a bad place, even if it is quiet."

The thought seemed to trouble him. It was quite a few moments before he answered.

"Miss Tabb," he said at length, "there's something I

want to tell you; but you must promise not to speak of it, on your honor."

"On my honor." She smiled at him in mock seriousness. "What is the deadly secret?"

"This: I may not be here long. In fact, I may be leaving town very soon—in a day or two. Before I go I want you to know that there isn't anyone—anyone at all—that I shall regret not seeing as I shall regret not seeing you."

"Oh!" Virginia struggled between surprise and disappointment. "Your work at the office has been satisfactory. Mr. McMillan——"

"It isn't that. I can't explain—only don't forget your promise not to say anything."

"Are you going back to New York?" she asked.

"Wherever I go," he whispered, ignoring her question, "I shall wish that you were with me." He reached out and took her hand. "I know you'll think it absurd, but all these weeks, down at the office, I've watched you and imagined what it might be if you and I—if we—oh, well, what's the use!" He dropped her hand and gazed out at the dripping streets. "I shouldn't have told you any of this, but you'll respect my confidence, won't you?"

"Of course I will," she said, greatly confused. "And even if you do have to go away, which I hope you won't, you can write to me."

Harvey Thorpe gave a whimsical, almost boyish laugh.

"Why not go along with me?" he asked. "Would you?"

"I'd go anywhere," Miss Tabb gasped desperately, "with the man I loved."

There was a moment of silence. Then Mr. Thorpe made an encircling motion with his arms. In midair they stopped. He brought his clenched fists down upon his knees just as the cab slowed up before a small and narrow house.

"Some day," he said, "I'm going to remind you of that."

V

Harvey Thorpe was very busy the next day, so busy in fact that he did not look very often in the direction of

the little inclosure in which sat Miss Virginia Tabb. It seemed to that young woman that he rather avoided looking at her; and in the state of mind in which she naturally found herself his neglect distressed her beyond measure.

Just what the nature of his trouble was she could not imagine, but that it was very real her intuition told her plainly enough. Was he about to be discharged? It seemed out of the question. Did some frightful disease consume him? A glance at his lean but ruddy cheeks dispelled the idea at once. Or was there some nemesis about to overtake him, some dire punishment for past crimes? Miss Tabb did not pretend to be a psychologist, but she would have staked her last drop of blood upon the honesty of Mr. Harvey Thorpe; which is perhaps only another way of saying that she was head over heels in love with him.

Cool, imperturbable, smiling, Mr. Thorpe plodded through the eventless day, the very epitome of self-possession. He seemed to be without a care in the world, yet when he left the office shortly after banking hours, and considerably earlier than was his habit, there reposed in the pocket of his overcoat an envelope containing forty thousand dollars in unregistered securities.

Mr. Rossman, who was waiting for him, received him at once.

"Well?" he asked, looking up.

Harvey Thorpe took the package of bonds from his pocket and tossed it on the desk.

"Forty thousand," he said laconically.

The lawyer opened the envelope and ran through the bonds, noting their character and amount. Then he replaced them, pushed the package toward his caller.

"You told me to get all I could," Thorpe said, "and then come to you for advice. Here I am."

"Do you want this money," Rossman asked, "or do you want to get off? You could probably run away."

"I want to get off, of course. I told you that; and I don't see how stealing forty thousand more is going to make it any easier."

"Mr. Thorpe," the lawyer remarked, lighting a fresh cigar, "if you went to your people and told them you had stolen ten thousand dollars, and it was all gone, you wouldn't have anything to offer them, would you?"

"Certainly not."

"Well, if you were to go to them now or, rather, if I were to go for you, and say that you have stolen fifty thousand dollars, but are ready to give forty thousand back, provided you are guaranteed immunity from prosecution, you'd be in a position to make terms, wouldn't you? They would rather have the forty thousand now than take chances on having you beat it and maybe getting nothing at all."

"I suppose they would," Mr. Thorpe replied, not without a look of admiration. "How are you going to manage it?"

"I'm going over to see your president, Mr. McMillan, at once." He reached for the telephone.

"Will you want these?" Thorpe asked, pushing the package of securities with his finger.

"No, not now. I couldn't afford to have stolen goods in my possession. By the way, I presume you remembered to keep a record of the accounts from which these securities were taken—and the ten thousand you took before?"

"Yes; I hoped, when I began speculating, to be able to put the bonds back, so I made a memorandum in each case of the notes to which they belong."

He drew a slip of paper from his pocket and laid it on the desk. Mr. Rossman took it, rose.

"McMillan's in. I won't be gone long. Suppose you wait here."

"All right." Harvey Thorpe sat down and lit a cigarette.

VI

Mr. Cyrus McMillan, in the seclusion of his private office, was finishing up the work of the day. It was after banking hours, but the Central's president prided himself

upon being the hardest working man in his organization. He glanced up, smiling, as his secretary came in with a card.

"It's Mr. Rossman, the gentleman who just telephoned," Miss Tabb said.

"Show him in; and, Virginia, remain during our interview, please. There may be some dictation."

"Yes, sir."

The girl got pencil and notebook from her desk, opened the swinging gate of the inclosure and followed Mr. Rossman into the private office. The lawyer glanced at her sharply.

"I think it better that we talk in private," he said.

"Miss Tabb has my entire confidence," remarked Mr. McMillan, waving the girl to a seat. "What can I do for you, Mr. Rossman?"

The latter shrugged his shoulders and sank into a chair.

"One of your young men here in the bank," he said, "has stolen some money. He came to me for advice."

"What?" Mr. McMillan's urbanity fell from him like a cloak. "You mean to say one of my employes is a thief?"

"Yes."

"Who is it?"

"Your assistant note teller, Mr. Thorpe."

"Thorpe?" Mr. McMillan demanded, angry and incredulous.

His voice rendered inaudible the gasp of horror which burst from Virginia Tabb's lips.

She shuddered, then sat quite still, the blood draining from her cheeks.

"Yes," Mr. Rossman went on in even tones. "He came to me and confessed."

"Then why did you not have him arrested at once?"

"You forget, Mr. McMillan, that disclosures made by a client to his attorney are sacred. Professional ethics would not permit me to violate them."

"Humph! How much has he taken?"

"Fifty thousand dollars."

"Impossible!" Mr. McMillan roared.

The lawyer drew a slip of paper from his pocket.

"Here is a memorandum he gave me, showing the several accounts from which the securities were taken. They were, I understand, unregistered bonds attached as collateral to certain notes."

Mr. McMillan seized the slip of paper, glanced at his watch, pressed a button on his desk, all in one swift movement.

"This is a terrible shock to me—a terrible shock," he groaned, staring at the memorandum in his hand. Virginia Tabb sat unnoticed, like a figure of wax. A slender, grey-haired man came to the door of the office.

"You sent for me, sir?" he asked.

"Yes, Carter—yes. The vaults are still open. Find out at once whether the securities on this list are missing."

"Missing?" Mr. Carter's face blanched.

"Yes; as quickly as possible, please." He turned to the lawyer as the other man went out. "Where is this fellow Thorpe now?"

"I could not tell you even if I knew. You understand, of course, Mr. McMillan, that I have no desire to protect a criminal from the consequences of his acts. Ordinarily, if a man were to come to me, confess that he was a thief and ask me for advice, I should tell him to leave my office and surrender himself to the authorities at once. As a good citizen that would be my duty. But in this case the circumstances are different. The man is repentant. He desires to make amends. Had I refused to help him he would have left town at once, taking his stealings with him. No doubt he would ultimately be apprehended, but whether the bonds he now has in his possession would be recovered is another matter. Personally, I doubt it. He might not be caught for months. During that period he could readily dispose of the securities or hide them where they might never be found. In his present mood he is ready to compromise."

"You mean to say, then," exclaimed Mr. McMillan with

a sigh of relief, "that he still has the stolen bonds in his possession?"

"Some of them; not all. He lost a large sum speculating in the stock market."

"How much has he left?"

"He tells me," Mr. Rossman said slowly, "that he still is in possession of bonds to the amount of twenty-five thousand dollars. These he proposes to surrender to you if you will agree not to prosecute. Otherwise it is his intention to disappear. I advised him to come here and make the proposition himself; but fearing arrest he declined, so I undertook to make it for him. If you agree to his terms he will hand the bonds over to me and I will deliver them to you. If not, I will simply tell him that I have been unsuccessful, and you can proceed as you see fit."

Mr. Rossman puffed nonchalantly at his cigar.

"If I accept your proposition," said Mr. McMillan sternly, "how do you propose to communicate with this man, since you say you do not know where he is?"

"He is to telephone me at five o'clock. If your answer is favorable I will make an appointment to meet him. If not, I will tell him so and he will probably escape. Naturally I do not know where he will telephone from."

"Why not make the appointment and notify me as to the place, so that I can call in the police?"

"I have pointed out before," Mr. Rossman said with quick indignation, "that the relations between a lawyer and his client are confidential. I could under no circumstances be party to a scheme to entrap this man into arrest. I am not a stool pigeon, Mr. McMillan. Thorpe proposes to make restitution at fifty cents on the dollar. I do not advise you one way or the other. I merely bring his offer to your attention. What do you wish to do about it?"

As he finished speaking the door of the office opened. Mr. Carter stood on the threshold, his face twitching.

"The bonds are gone!" he exclaimed. "It must have been Thorpe! Shall I notify the police?"

"No, Carter; not yet. Say nothing to anyone. But check up our other loans, please, and see if any further securities are missing."

When Mr. Carter had gone the banker turned to Rossman.

"Mr. Rossman," he said, "I have decided to accept your proposition. Even by arresting Thorpe we could recover no more than he now offers; and should he escape we run the risk of getting nothing. I shall wait here until six o'clock. If the bonds have not been delivered to me by that hour I shall call in the police."

"They will be delivered," the lawyer said, and went out.

As the door closed behind him Virginia Tabb rose in her chair. The color had returned to her cheeks, the light of battle shone in her eyes.

"I don't believe Mr. Thorpe is a thief!" she exclaimed. "That man Rossman is the one who defended my brother's murderer! He is crooked all through! I don't believe a word he says!"

Mr. McMillan regarded his secretary with a very kindly smile.

"We shall know by six o'clock," he said. "You will wait, of course."

VII

Mr. Rossman, returning to his office, found Harvey Thorpe just finishing his third cigarette. The package of bonds lay on the desk where he had left it. The lawyer took it up, thrust it into his pocket.

"Everything is all right," he said. "I'm to return the bonds and McMillan won't prosecute. I guess for the sake of the bank's reputation he'd rather keep the matter dark. Young man, you're getting off easy."

"Thank heaven I won't have to go to jail," Thorpe murmured. "But how am I going to pay you for your services?"

"Haven't you any money?"

"Only enough to get out of town with."

"Very well. I'll charge you a thousand dollars and take your note for it. Pay me when you can. Meanwhile I'll hold the agreement I get from Mr. McMillan not to prosecute, as security." He quickly filled out a blank form and passed it across the desk. "Where have you decided to go?"

"Back to New York, I guess," Thorpe said as he signed the note. "You're sure everything is all right?"

"Absolutely. McMillan gave me his word."

"Then I guess I'll be moving along. Mr. Rossman, you certainly have done me a big service."

"Oh, that's all right," the lawyer assured him. "I never like to see a decent fellow go wrong. Take a fresh start, young man, and keep out of the stock market."

"I will; you can depend on that. You—you're going back to Mr. McMillan's at once, aren't you?"

"Yes. Why?" A gleam of annoyance rose in the lawyer's eyes.

"Well, I wouldn't want there to be any slip-up. There isn't much time, you know. Do you mind if I walk along with you?"

For the fraction of a second the lawyer hesitated. Then he shook his head.

"No," he replied. "But I can't permit you to go in. If Mr. McMillan saw you he might get angry and change his mind."

"I won't go in," Thorpe said hastily. "I'm going home and pack my things. Do you mind if I telephone you in half an hour, to be sure everything is all right?"

"Not a bit. I'll be at the office until six. And now, if you'll excuse me for a few moments, I'll answer these telephone calls"—he indicated some penciled memoranda on his desk—"and be right with you. Take a seat in the outer office."

Mr. Thorpe picked up his hat and went out.

VIII

"Virginia," said Mr. McMillan, putting down the newspaper he had been reading, "do you mind if I ask you a question?"

"No, sir," the girl replied listlessly.

She had been sitting in silence for a long time, contemplating a shattered illusion.

"Are you in love with Harvey Thorpe?"

"Why, Mr. McMillan"—the girl crimsoned beneath his kindly eyes—"I—I don't know."

"Please don't mind my asking. You know the interest I've felt in you, especially since your brother's death. But it did not seem to me that the young man has paid you any special attention."

"Oh, he hasn't, Mr. McMillan—he hasn't, really. But I've always admired him. He seemed so—different. I can't believe, now, that he has done anything—anything he shouldn't."

"It must be wonderful," Mr. McMillan said, with a far-off look in his eyes, "to have anyone believe in you like that. Tell me, has he ever said anything to you—about caring I mean?"

"No; at least not until last night, and then only in the vaguest way. He took my hand and seemed to want to tell me something, and then he suddenly stopped and spoke of going away. I didn't know what he meant then, but now——"

She turned and stared out of the window; and Mr. McMillan, although he could not see her face, knew that she was weeping. He growled something in his throat, looked at his watch.

"After five. I think, my dear, you had better wait outside so as to show him in; and this time I'll see him alone."

Miss Tabb's eyes were openly hostile when, a few minutes later, she ushered Mr. Rossman into the private office. The lawyer wasted no time on formalities. He took an envelope from his pocket.

"Mr. McMillan," he said, "I have here the bonds which Thorpe turned over to me, and which I am to deliver to you on condition that he is to be guaranteed immunity from prosecution on the part of the bank, or of anyone connected with or acting for it—including, of course, the bonding company. In other words, he is to go free. Is that fully understood?"

"Yes." Again the banker nodded. "Even if I have to make good the loss myself."

"Then count these, please"—Rossman handed over the package of bonds—"and let me know if the amount is correct."

Mr. McMillan went through the bundle of securities, one by one, noting the amounts.

"Twenty-five thousand," he presently said. "Very good."

"In that case"—the lawyer drew a slim document from his pocket—"I will ask you to sign this form of release."

He placed the paper in Mr. McMillan's hands and sat down. Unhurriedly the banker opened it and began to read. It was very quiet in the room, and yet, because of the thick plate-glass-and-mahogany door, neither of its occupants heard the gasp of amazement with which Virginia Tabb, glancing up from her desk, greeted Harvey Thorpe.

"Rossman is in there, of course?" he asked, nodding toward the door of the private office.

"Yes," Virginia whispered, big-eyed; "and in spite of what he says, Mr. Thorpe, I'll never believe that you are a thief as long as I live."

Mr. Thorpe gave her a quick, whimsical smile.

"Would you marry me, Virginia," he whispered, "if I were to ask you now?"

"Yes!" There was hot defiance in her eyes. "No matter what anybody says!"

With one arm Harvey Thorpe swept her to him, gave her a kiss that left her gasping. Then he strode to the door of the private office and thrust it open. Mr. McMillan looked up. He was still reading the agreement that Rossman had given him.

"Ah, Thorpe," he said quietly, "so you're here."

The lawyer, galvanized to immediate action, jumped to his feet. The expression on his face, however, was still confident as he stared at Thorpe standing in the open doorway. Behind him Virginia Tabb regarded the scene with amazement.

"Mr. Rossman has returned to me the twenty-five thousand dollars' worth of bonds you gave him," the banker went on.

"Twenty-five thousand?" Thorpe smiled coldly. "I gave him forty."

"Forty!" Mr. McMillan exclaimed. "Mr. Rossman, what have you to say to that?"

"Nothing, except that it's a lie. Mr. Thorpe handed me twenty-five thousand dollars' worth of bonds. I have turned them over to you. If he can prove to the contrary, let him do it. I hardly think the word of a confessed thief would have weight against mine."

"I suppose you mean, Rossman," said Thorpe quietly, "that since there were no witnesses present when I gave you the bonds you can deny ever having received that extra fifteen thousand and get away with it. Is that the idea?"

"I gave Mr. McMillan what you gave me. That's all I have to say."

"No doubt. But unfortunately for you, Rossman, it isn't all I have to say. If I had been a thief, as you supposed, your little scheme would have worked perfectly. But I'm not. I was put here in the bank by Mr. McMillan, acting with certain other influential men in town, for the express purpose of trapping you, and it looks as though I had succeeded. No, you're not going yet." His automatic checked the lawyer's sudden move toward the door. "First I want to explain about that missing fifteen thousand. The only chance you had to switch it from the package I gave you was during the few moments you were alone in your private office. I knew, of course, that that was why you excused yourself. You weren't taking any chances of having those stolen bonds in your possession, so you slipped

them into an envelope, called in your secretary and told him to take the package over to Tom Casey."

"It's a lie!" Rossman shouted, his face the color of dried putty.

"No, it isn't, Rossman. It's the truth. One of my other men—I wasn't working alone, of course—nabbed the boy before he left the building." He drew an envelope from his pocket and laid it on the banker's desk. "He had this in his pocket."

"You can't prove I gave it to him!" the lawyer snarled. "He may have stolen the bonds himself."

"The only weak spot in that theory, Rossman," remarked Thorpe with a smile, "lies in the fact that the envelope is addressed in your own handwriting. And your secretary, not knowing, of course, what was in the package, has already admitted that you gave it to him. Further, every one of the bonds, besides being numbered, carried a private mark placed on it by Mr. McMillan himself. If you can get out of this thing, Rossman, you are better than Houdini. I'll have to ask you to come along with me now. There are two men from headquarters outside—men we know you don't happen to control. They're waiting for you."

"Before you go, Rossman," said Mr. McMillan sternly, "I want to say that in spite of your influence we are going to convict you, if we have to upset the entire city government to do it. We're tired of having this town run by the underworld. Your conviction will be the biggest blow to the criminal element they have received in fifty years.

"Mr. Thorpe, my associates and I owe you a vote of thanks."

"Come along, Rossman."

Thorpe nodded toward the outer office, then followed the lawyer through the little inclosure. As he passed Virginia Tabb he reached out and seized one of her hands.

"I'll be up to see you this evening," he whispered—"that is, if you don't mind marrying a detective."

Miss Tabb's only answer was a very becoming blush.

FREDERIC ARNOLD KUMMER

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND

I

"Do you mean to say," Elinor asked slowly, two scarlet spots showing against the dull white of her cheeks, "that you think this girl a thief?"

Donald McRae gave an uneasy glance about the big studio room.

"I mean to say all the evidence points that way," he replied lamely.

"As a student of criminal psychology, Don, you should be a better judge of human nature. And as a friend of the district attorney——"

"Elinor, for heaven's sake be sensible. Just because you spend your time digging up these unfortunate women, sympathizing with them, is no reason why I should ask the district attorney or anybody else to do the impossible. With all your money I should think you'd go in for something more sensible—worth while. Travel, for instance. Or art."

"Don't be a fool, Don. I've been everywhere, from Tokio to Kalamazoo. You know that. As for art, it's too often merely an excuse for rotten studio parties, nowadays. I'm trying to give a little help to some people who can't help themselves. Can you think of any better way to spend one's time and money?"

"All right. Suit yourself. But I don't see how I can do anything for this girl. As a lawyer——"

"As a lawyer, perhaps not." Elinor's voice was soft as an April shower. "But as a friend—a man who claims to care for me——"

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Donald sprang to his feet, thrusting the red-brown hair from his forehead with a characteristic gesture.

"I do," he exclaimed, "and you know it."

"Then why won't you try to help me?"

"Elinor, sit down." He waved to a chair, resumed his own. "Let us go over this girl's case in detail. Then if you can point out to me anything I can do, why—I promise you I'll do it."

"Fair enough." Elinor threw herself on the couch. "I told you, didn't I, that she'd been employed for over a year as secretary by a Mr. Jacob Krantz, of Krantz & Co., jewelers, in Maiden Lane?"

"Yes."

"Well—last month—on the seventeenth, to be exact—young Mr. Krantz, who travels for the firm, came in from a business trip and placed on his father's desk a leather case containing unset diamonds to the value of thirty-four thousand dollars. They were of various sizes, wrapped in seven small packets of white tissue paper. Mr. Krantz states he opened the packets, examined and counted their contents in his son's presence, as was his invariable custom, and found everything to be correct."

"To whom did he make this statement? The police?"

"No. To me. I went to see him. But I'll come to that later. Mr. Krantz, it seems, after taking the packets from his son's case, placed them on a small wooden tray on the desk. Then he called his secretary—Pennington's her name—Jane Pennington—and told her to take the stones to the office of his partner, Mr. Stern, at the other end of the suite. It was Mr. Stern's business to verify Mr. Krantz's count and then lock the diamonds in the safe."

"I see. How did Krantz summon his secretary?"

"By calling to her through the door leading to the outer office. He had to turn his head, but did *not* have to leave his desk. His son was standing alongside of him."

"You think, then," Donald said quickly, detecting a certain significance in Elinor's words, "that while his father's head was turned young Krantz might have——"

"It is at least possible," remarked Elinor.

"But highly improbable. A member of the firm. Entrusted with the task of carrying thousands of dollars' worth of stones about the country on business trips. One would hardly think he would wait to commit a theft directly under his father's nose. What happened then?"

"Miss Pennington took the tray and carried it down the corridor to the office of Mr. Stern. The corridor is some twenty feet long, narrow, and rather dark, in spite of the ground glass partitions along either side of it. She was alone while passing through it, of course. As soon as she had placed the tray on Mr. Stern's desk she hurried to the front office, took her hat and coat from a rack and went to lunch.

"Five minutes later Mr. Stern dashed into his partner's office with the news that one of the packets, containing diamonds to the value of eight thousand dollars, was missing. His stenographer, Miss Grasty, who was with him at the time, verified his statement.

"Mr. Krantz thought it significant that Miss Pennington had gone out over fifteen minutes ahead of her regular time. He at once sent for a private detective. When Miss Pennington came back from lunch he accused her. Both he and his son swore that there were seven packets of stones on the tray when it was turned over to her.

"She denied everything, said she had not counted the packets herself, explained her leaving the office so early by saying she had a headache and wanted to go to the drug store to get something for it.

"She was searched, of course, but nothing was found on her. Mr. Krantz said he didn't expect to find anything—that her purpose in leaving the office so quickly had been to turn the stones over to a confederate, or hide them somewhere, to be recovered later."

"Did she meet anyone while she was out?"

"Yes. In a drug store two blocks away."

"Who?"

"A young man named Ashton—James Ashton, with whom, it seems, she is in love. He's an electrician, I believe, employed by the New Jersey Chemical Company."

"H-m!" Donald gave Elinor a curious look. "Everything you've told me," he said, "seems to point inexorably to the girl's guilt. Isn't there anything to be said in her favor?"

"Nothing, except that I believe her," Elinor said quietly.

"Did Krantz turn her over to the police?"

"No. It wasn't her arrest he wanted, so much as the diamonds. He let her go. Under the watchful eye of the detective, of course. Gave her twenty-four hours in which to produce the jewels or make the loss good. He thought she might weaken, I suppose, and come across with the missing stones."

"Fair enough. Most men would have let the police give her the third degree."

"I don't know. He still had that in reserve. It was young Krantz who suggested the arrangement. An oily little rat. I forgot to tell you that Miss Pennington said he had been making advances to her for some time. Tried to kiss her once when she stayed after office hours. She slapped his face."

"H-m. Well, that often happens with good-looking girls who work in offices. Doesn't prove anything. What happened then?"

"Well, not having any relatives or friends ready to put up eight thousand dollars for her, she went home, to the house where she boards. She might have told young Ashton about her trouble, but she was—well, ashamed. And afraid, too, that he'd get after Krantz and beat him up, I guess.

"Along about half-past eight young Krantz came to see her. Offered to make the loss good if she'd move over to his flat. The usual proposition. Being a decent girl, she ordered him out. They had some words.

"Miss Whiteley, my secretary, who lives in the same house, overheard the row, and, according to instructions, reported the matter to me.

"Well, to make a long story short, I had Miss Pennington brought here and heard her story. The next day I went down to the office with her and paid Krantz the eight thousand. So that's that."

"H-m. Rather a quixotic thing to do, it seems to me. How do you know she wasn't lying?"

"I know women," Elinor said quietly.

"Maybe. You certainly have a generous heart, and are therefore easily imposed upon. I sometimes think, Elinor, that you rather fancy yourself in this rôle of a female Robin Hood, always ready to take up the cudgels on behalf of the under dog. It's a charming idea, but if you don't look out you'll find yourself in a nasty mess, some day. Well, I've heard the story. What did you expect me to do?"

"I don't believe, Donald," Elinor remarked, a trace of irony in her voice, "that I really expected you to do anything. But I thought there might be just a chance you could get your friend, Inspector Doyle, to have young Krantz watched, arrested, perhaps, when he tries to dispose of those stones. He took them. I'm convinced of that."

"You'd have to produce more evidence than you have now to make headquarters think so. As for disposing of the stones—provided he's got them—I don't doubt, being in the business, he'll have his own ways of doing that. Unset diamonds of moderate size are pretty much alike. You're asking the impossible."

Elinor sat with her chin cupped in one hand, gazing moodily at the Chinese rug. There was sullen anger in her wide, dark eyes; the set of her slender shoulders bespoke a fixed determination.

"All right," she said. "Then I'll have to go it alone."

"Look here, Elinor!" Donald exclaimed. "Be careful. Don't try anything dangerous. Is it worth it? Eight thousand dollars?"

"It's the principle of the thing. Krantz and his son practically have made this girl admit herself a thief. And she isn't one. I'd stake my last dollar on it.

"Think what it means to her self-respect—to the man she loves. How is she going to explain the loss of her position? The story's bound to get around. She's crushed,

wiped out, done. Afraid to look the world in the face, because she feels she's been branded as a crook.

"I want to give her back her courage, her hope, her faith, her love. And if there's any way it can be done, short of murder, I'm going to do it. I trust I make myself quite clear, Mr. McRae," she finished.

After Don had gone, Elinor lay flat on her back on the couch for over an hour, staring up at the ceiling. When she finally rose to her feet it was in response to a message from her secretary, Miss Whiteley.

"Mr. Ashton's here," the secretary said. "Are you ready to see him?"

"What sort of a looking fellow is he, Helen?" Elinor asked, smiling.

"Well—not the kind of a man I'd care to start an argument with, if that's what you mean."

"Good!" Elinor's eyes snapped. "Show him in."

II

Miss Sadie Pollock, the young woman who had taken Jane Pennington's place as private secretary to Mr. Krantz, glanced at the caller who had just entered the office with a look of cool disdain. He was a tall, eager-faced young man, neatly but by no means smartly dressed. A workman, Miss Pollock thought.

"Well?" she asked.

"I want to see Mr. Krantz. Mr. Jacob Krantz. Personally. About buying some stones," the young man announced.

Miss Pollock retired to the inner office, trying to conceal her surprise. A man like that buying diamonds! It seemed incredible. Presently she returned.

"Mr. Krantz will see you at once," she said.

The diamond dealer rose from his chair with outstretched hand as his caller came into the room.

"Sit down." He waved toward a chair. "I understand you wish to buy some stones."

"No," the man replied, taking a seat. "I don't want to buy any."

"Then why did you tell my secretary so?" Mr. Krantz growled, his good nature vanishing like a puff of smoke. "My time is valuable. If you are an agent or canvasser of any sort——" he glanced significantly toward the door.

The young man did not at once reply. Instead he felt in his pocket and, drawing out a small, round object, rolled it across the glass top of Mr. Krantz's desk.

"I told your secretary I wanted to see you about buying some stones," he said. "You, however, were to do the buying. Here is a diamond I would like to sell."

Mr. Krantz' hard little eyes gleamed with cupidity as he gazed at the jewel before him. An uncut stone, in shape a rough octahedron, it was about the size of a small cherry.

"We don't buy from strangers," he said, making a shrewd guess as to the stone's value. "At least, not as a rule. Where did you get it?"

"What's that to you?" The man shrugged his shoulders. "Maybe I've just got back from South Africa. Or Brazil." He gave the diamond dealer a brazen wink. "You can have it for two thousand."

Mr. Krantz spoke softly through the telephone for a moment. Almost at once his partner, Mr. Stern, came into the office, fat, bland, smiling.

"How much can we offer for this, Sam?" Mr. Krantz said, handing him the diamond.

Mr. Stern sat down at a little table equipped with a pair of delicate, glass-covered scales, magnifying glasses, and other devices incident to the jewel trade. He was busy for several moments weighing the stone, testing its colors, its refraction. Presently he rose and placed the diamond on his partner's desk.

"About fifteen hundred," he announced, with elaborate carelessness. "It ain't worth more, considering the risk of cutting."

Mr. Krantz grunted assent. Both he and Mr. Stern were quite well aware that the stone would have been cheap

at two thousand, but their caller looked like a person in need of money.

"All right." The man shrugged his shoulders. "Cash." Mr. Krantz frowned.

"Cash? There ain't no comeback, is there?"

"No. The stone is mine, all right. But for certain reasons I'd rather not take a check."

Mr. Krantz unlocked the safe behind him, drew out some packages of bills. He, too, saw advantages in a cash transaction.

Whereupon Mr. Krantz paid over the money. The young man rose.

"I may bring you in another one, before long," he said, and, with a curious smile, left the office.

"What do you think, Sam?" Mr. Krantz asked when the door had closed behind him.

"Smuggled, of course. It's a South African stone. Fine water. Ought to cut fine, too." He took the bit of crystal and balanced it in his hand. "Good for a thousand profit. I wonder if he knew its value. He seemed mighty anxious to sell. I hope he comes back again."

"If he does," Mr. Krantz grunted, "we'll offer less. There's something fishy about it."

III

The young man *did* come back a few days later, bringing with him an even larger and finer stone than the one he had brought before. He asked three thousand dollars for it. Mr. Krantz refused to pay a cent more than two, and Mr. Stern backed him up.

"We're taking a big chance," Mr. Krantz grumbled, as he began to count out the purchase price. "How do we know where you got these stones? We don't want to do anything crooked."

"They weren't smuggled," the man said, "and they weren't stolen. You can bank on it."

"Then all I can say is, young fellow," remarked Mr.

Krantz, "you must have a private diamond mine right here in America."

"Nothing like that, either." The man rose. "I—I really can't explain." Smiling apologetically, he hurried from the office.

The instant he had gone Mr. Krantz turned to his son, who had been sitting at a desk in a far corner of the room.

"Jump, Morris! Follow him," he said. "Don't lose sight of him. We got to find out where he's getting them stones."

With a quick nod young Mr. Krantz put on his hat and went out.

Mr. Morris Krantz was slim, dark, quick, and noiseless in his movements, and therefore well equipped for the task which lay ahead of him. Without looking directly at his quarry, he strolled toward the elevator.

The man paid no attention to him. When the car reached the ground floor he hurried to the sidewalk and began to walk rapidly in the direction of the Hudson Terminal. Mr. Krantz followed, not too closely, and when his quarry got into a subway train managed to enter the same car at its other end without being observed and rode to the terminus of the underground line in Jersey City. He was immediately behind his man, however, at the railroad ticket office in Jersey City, and when the former asked for a ticket to Hillsdale Mr. Krantz bought one to the same place.

At the station the man jumped into a taxicab and drove off. Mr. Krantz did the same.

"Just follow that car," he told the chauffeur. "Not too close, though. I don't want them to know they're being followed."

The first car, after proceeding for about a mile through the straggling suburban town, turned into a side street on the outskirts and presently stopped before a small, unimportant looking frame house. Noting its location, Mr. Krantz told his driver to go on to the next corner and turn. Here he got out, paid his fare, and walked back to the house at which the man had stopped.

The house stood in a wide, shaded lot, and behind it was a small brick building, in appearance a garage. As Mr. Krantz passed the front of the place he saw the man he had been following leave the house by a rear door and proceed down a gravel walk to the garage. A light presently flashed inside. Mr. Krantz hurried around to the back of the lot and along a narrow lane to the brick building with windows on both sides. Cautiously he peered in.

His first glance told him the place was not a garage. Instead, it seemed to be some sort of a laboratory. In its center was a square concrete pedestal, on which stood an oblong box, made apparently of fire brick. Heavy cables, leading to brass attachments at either end, made Mr. Krantz conclude that the apparatus was electrical in its nature. The man busied himself for a moment with the binding screws at one end of the box, glanced at his wrist watch, then snapped off the lights and went out. Mr. Krantz watched him as he returned to the house; the activity in the illuminated rear kitchen caused him to conclude that his man had gone in for dinner.

But Mr. Krantz was far too excited himself to think about food. An idea of tremendous importance had come to him, one which even yet he could not completely grasp. Had the man locked the door? He thought not, and a quick investigation told him that he was right. Like a shadow he slipped into the room.

The place was in semi-darkness, and he did not dare to switch on the lights for fear they would be observed from the house. One thing, however, was visible: the box on the concrete pedestal shone in the darkness with a fierce white glow, giving off an odor suggestive of intense heat.

At the far end of the room he discerned a flight of steps leading to the floor above. In a moment he had ascended and found himself in a low loft, filled with trunks, old furniture, and books. There were cracks in the rough pine floor; he took out his pocket knife and widened one of them until he could see through quite clearly.

An hour passed, and he was beginning to wonder whether

the man was coming back, when he suddenly heard footsteps, the opening and closing of a door. Immediately the room beneath him was flooded with brilliant light.

There were two persons in the place now, one the young man he had been following, the other a dark and slender girl, wearing an apron of brown linen. The former was busy for a time, adjusting some apparatus at one side of the room. The girl, meanwhile, went to the oblong box at the center of the room, and, after turning a switch, took up a pair of tongs and plunged them into the glowing mass with which it was filled.

A blinding glare met Mr. Krantz' eyes, then he saw that the girl held in her tongs a white-hot object about the size of an orange, which she at once dropped into a tub of water on the floor at her side.

There was a prodigious hissing, accompanied by clouds of steam. For several moments the girl waited, glancing at an open book which lay on a small table. Then she took up her tongs, and fishing about in the water of the tub, brought up a round, black mass.

Her companion now joined her, and with a hammer proceeded to break open the object as one might crack a nut; thereupon they gazed eagerly at something contained within it, showing, meanwhile, the greatest delight. Then, with a few words which Mr. Krantz could not hear, the man switched off the lights and, with his companion, went out.

The turning of a key in the lock of the door was distinctly audible, and also the closing of the heavy window shutters. The building had evidently been closed for the night.

With sweat streaming down his back, Mr. Krantz descended to the floor below. If the things he had seen meant what he thought they did, it was well that he had come.

One thing was certain—he would have to find out before he left the place, provided he could leave it at all, now that the door was locked. That, he argued, was to prevent anyone from entering from without; a quick inspec-

tion of the windows with the aid of a lighted match told him he would have no difficulty in making his escape from within. And the fact that the shutters were closed made it possible for him to turn on the lights without danger of detection from the house.

It took him several moments to locate the switch; but, this done, the room was at once illuminated with a very brilliant greenish-white light.

The dark object which the man had broken open with the hammer still lay on the table. It consisted of a rough, granular shell of what looked like cast iron.

As Mr. Krantz examined it an expression of amazement crossed his face.

Inside, occupying a small cavity, was a grayish crystal about the size of a large pea. He glanced at it eagerly for a moment, then thrust it into his waistcoat pocket.

The book lying open on the table next attracted his attention. It was a work on industrial chemistry. One of the paragraphs was marked. Mr. Krantz stared at it with bulging eyes as he read:

Ever since the successful experiments by Henri Moissan, scientists have known that the manufacture of crystallized carbon, or diamonds, is well within the possibilities of the modern electric furnace. Moissan made actual diamonds, but they were very small. Only the proper development of his process is needed to make them of any size desired.

But the problem is of no interest to the scientist, because, unlike synthetic rubber, or indigo, carbon crystals have no value in the industrial world. Nor would their production on a large scale attract the manufacturer, since his investment would become so much junk the moment his product was put on the market.

The mere knowledge that quantity production was at hand would at once reduce the value of all the diamonds in the world, even the Kohinoor, to the price of so much glass. Hence the manufacture of diamonds is not likely to be attempted, unless by some individual operating in the

strictest secrecy, and marketing his product with the utmost care.

With a groan Mr. Krantz turned from the book. All the diamonds in the world worth no more than so much glass! And Krantz & Co. had over a quarter of a million dollars' worth of stones in their vaults!

Scarcely able to think, he raised one of the windows, unfastened the shutters, and, having switched off the lights, dropped noiselessly to the ground outside.

Was the thing real? He could scarcely believe it. And yet how else explain the uncut diamonds the young man had brought to the office, had sold at far below their real market value?

He had one in his waistcoat pocket now. As he waited for the New York train he drew the diamond across the pane of the station window. It cut a deep, white mark.

In the private office of Mr. Jacob Krantz three very white-faced men sat about the senior partner's desk the next day. Mr. Krantz himself was so filled with dismay that his features had shriveled up to the semblance of a dried apple. Mr. Stern was as gray as a death mask. Young Morris Krantz, his sleek hair on end, his eyes wide and fearful, had just finished an account of his adventures.

"Sam," Mr. Krantz remarked slowly, "what do you think we should do?"

"Do?" Mr. Stern picked up the uncut stone and gazed at it helplessly. "We can't do nothing. If diamonds can be made in a lab'ratory, like Morris here says, we might just as well now go out of business. Why, if the story got in the newspapers we couldn't sell our stock at five cents on the dollar!"

"For why should it get in the newspapers, Sam?" Mr. Krantz asked. "These people is cleaning up a thousand or two a week selling us some stones. Ain't it the last thing in the world they'd want to do—have their secret made public? I ain't afraid they'll tell anybody. I got a better idea, Sam. Let's have a talk with this fellow. Tell him

we're on to his secret and are ready to market his product for him fifty-fifty. Make him sign an agreement not to sell through anybody but us. Point out to him that if he ain't careful he'll lose the whole works."

Mr. Stern nodded slowly in agreement.

"You're right, Jake," he said. "We better get out to Jersey at once and have a talk with him. Tell him where he gets off.

A knock at the door followed his words. Miss Pollock came in bearing a letter. Mr. Krantz tore it open, read aloud the contents:

Dear Mr. Krantz: Please be at the above address tonight at eight o'clock. Bring your son and your partner, Mr. Stern, with you. Ask for Miss Vance, on the sixth floor. We want to talk to you about diamonds.

"That's that," said Mr. Krantz, dropping the note on his desk. "Sam, I ain't feeling well. Think I'll get a cup of coffee."

IV

Elinor came into the living room wearing a gown of green and silver which made Donald McRae catch his breath. He could combat the girl's intelligence, her gay insolence, but her beauty always left him helpless.

"You gorgeous thing!" he gasped, holding out his hands.

She took them in her firm, cool grip.

"It's good of you to come here, Donald," she said sinking into a chair. "You remember what I told you about Miss Pennington. Well, I've taken action in her case, and——"

"You haven't been doing anything you shouldn't, I hope," he said, noting the seriousness of her smile. "Of course, if you're in any trouble——"

"Thanks, old dear. I'm not—yet. But I may need your help before the evening's over. You have authority to make arrests, haven't you?"

"Yes." Donald lit a cigaret, regarding Elinor with a puzzled frown. What deviltry was she up to now? An amazing woman, who would stop at nothing to gain her ends. She enjoyed the risks to which she was forever subjecting herself as other women might enjoy a hand of bridge. Even now she was gazing at him like some mischievous elf.

"What's the game?" he asked suddenly.

"Don't look so downhearted, old dear," she laughed. "The worst I'm capable of tonight is a little blackmail."

"Blackmail?" Donald gasped.

"Well, you might call it that." She went to the door and called to someone in the next room. A tall, eager-faced young man came in, accompanied by a slender and very charming girl of twenty. Elinor took the latter's hand.

"Miss Pennington," she said, smiling, "this is my friend, Mr. McRae, and Mr. Ashton, Mr. McRae." She nodded to the young man with the eager face. "Mr. Ashton is an electrician—a chemist. He and I have been making some very interesting experiments at his private laboratory over in New Jersey, looking to establishing Miss Pennington's innocence of the crime of which she has been accused. We hope we have succeeded."

Mr. Ashton slipped his arm about his companion's waist.

"If we haven't," he said grimly, "somebody's due for an awful beating up before the evening's over."

"Remember, please," Elinor said, placing her hand on his arm, "you promised not to start anything——"

"Well," he turned away grimly, "I guess that goes. Till the evening's over, anyway. Glad to have met you," he nodded to McRae. "Come along, Jane." With his arm still about the slender girl, Ashton returned to the adjoining room.

"She won't marry him," Elinor whispered, "until her innocence has been proved. Her pride, you know. She's afraid he might still think——" a timid knock at the door stopped her, then she opened it.

Mr. Krantz, Mr. Stern, and young Morris filed in

solemnly. Even in their perturbed state of mind they did not fail to note the costly fittings of the room. "A thousand a week, easy," Mr. Krantz muttered to himself, glancing at Mr. McRae.

"My lawyer," Elinor said, introducing him.

"If I'd known it was a case of lawyers," Mr. Krantz remarked, staring uneasily at Donald, "I could've brought my own."

"I don't think you'll need one," Elinor remarked gayly. "Would you gentlemen mind stepping into the dining room?"

"Dining room! If you should ask me now, miss, to eat anything——"

"It isn't that. There's something I want to show you." She swept aside the curtains at the end of the room. "Just go in and take a seat. Don't fall over the chairs."

Her caution was needed. The room was in almost total darkness. Guided by the light which came through the parted curtains, the four men slowly filed into the room, Donald bringing up the rear. A semi-circle of chairs confronted them, two of which were already occupied, but the women who sat in them were not recognizable in the dim light.

"Find chairs, everybody," Elinor cried. "We're ready to begin."

In a state of complete bewilderment, Mr. Krantz and his companions sat down.

A faint hissing sound came from the rear of the room where Mr. Ashton stood.

Then a brilliant picture suddenly appeared on a sheet suspended against the opposite wall. Mr. Krantz gave a groan. The picture showed a small room, fitted up as a laboratory, and near the center of it, beside a table, stood Elinor herself, a pair of tongs in her hand. Presently, using the tongs, she lifted a small white-hot object from a box on the table and dropped it into a tub of water at her feet. A short delay ensued, then the little audience saw her take the object from the tub, saw the young man who had now joined her break it open on the top of the

table, whereupon they both proceeded to examine its contents with the utmost care.

Suddenly the scene blacked out, to be at once resumed with young Mr. Krantz as its central figure. For a few moments only was he visible, but during this time he moved swiftly and distinctly as he picked up the two halves of the dark object on the table, gazed at them for an instant, removed something from one of them, and thrust it into his waistcoat pocket. Almost immediately thereafter this picture, too, faded out and the dining room was suddenly flooded with light.

Mr. Krantz and his companions looked about, blinked.

Young Morris, recognizing Jane Pennington as one of the two women who sat near him, rose to his feet snarling like a trapped fox.

James Ashton stepped toward him, his fists clenched. Elinor swept into the half circle made by the chairs.

"Just a moment, please, everybody!" she exclaimed, raising her hand. "What you have just seen is a picture of a small private laboratory at Hillsdale, New Jersey, belonging to my friend, Mr. James Ashton. The picture was taken last night, by means of an automatic camera and the specially installed vacuum lamps with which the place is equipped.

"Mr. Krantz, Jr., forced his way into the place and, as you have seen, stole a diamond belonging to me worth two thousand dollars. Mr. Ashton and myself watched him do it through an opening in the door. There is a gentleman here who has authority to make an arrest."

"But"—Mr. Krantz, Sr., rose unsteadily to his feet—"that ain't the point, miss. Here's your diamond." He took the stone from his pocket and handed it to Elinor. "That ain't what we want to talk to you about. It—it's the diamond business.

"I don't like to say too much before witnesses," he continued, glancing pointedly at McRae and the two women, "but Morris ain't no thief. He only took that stone as evidence. We know what you're up to, and we want to make a deal with you. Can't we talk this thing over in

private? If anybody should be arrested, y'understand, and the story gets in the newspapers, we'd all be sunk! Ruined!"

Elinor regarded him with a frosty smile.

"Mr. Krantz," she said, "before I talk to you about the diamond business, there's another matter I want settled.

"You accused this young lady"—she indicated Jane Pennington—"of stealing eight thousand dollars' worth of diamonds from you. I lent her the money to make the loss good. Miss Pennington didn't steal the stones. I think your son did. If he is ready to confess and return them to you, well and good. If not, he'll be under arrest for burglary inside of two minutes. Is that clear?"

With a look of fury Mr. Krantz turned on young Morris.

"What you got to say for yourself, you?" he demanded, pointing a shaky forefinger.

"Better say it quick, too," Mr. Ashton added grimly. "If you know what's good for you." His clenched hands moved restlessly; he seemed to have difficulty in controlling them.

For a moment young Krantz hesitated, his face green with fear. Then he slowly drew a leather wallet from his pocket and took from it a little package.

"Here," he muttered, thrusting the package into his father's hand. "I—I found them on the floor."

"That clears Miss Pennington," Elinor remarked pleasantly, turning to the elder Mr. Krantz, "and leaves you owing me eight thousand dollars."

"I'll make out a check!" Mr. Krantz shouted, drawing a fountain pen from his pocket.

"Fair enough," Elinor told him. "And while you're about it you might add a couple of thousand more to cover my loss on those diamonds I sold you, and another ten, say for laceration of Miss Pennington's feelings. We'll call it a wedding present. Yes—twenty in all. And don't try to stop payment on the check tomorrow, either. If you do, your son goes to jail as sure as he's a foot high."

Completely bewildered, Mr. Krantz made out the check, handed it over. Never in all his career had he been so much at sea. Still, he reflected, the eight thousand dollars was justly owing, since he now had the diamonds back, and what difference did a few additional thousands make, compared with the prospect of manufacturing diamonds by the million.

"Now, miss," he whispered eagerly, "let's you and me talk a little business about them diamonds you made."

"Diamonds I made?" Elinor said, laughing. "I don't admit making any diamonds."

"Of course you don't, miss. I understand that. You couldn't admit it. If you did, you'd never be able to sell another one. But between you and me"—he glanced pointedly at the stone Elinor still held in her hand—"you made that one all right, for Morris saw you do it."

"You're mistaken, Mr. Krantz. This stone as well as the other two I sold you, I bought from an importer down in Maiden Lane. I'm afraid your son didn't understand what he saw at that laboratory last night. Mr. Ashton and I were making some experiments in criminal psychology. I never told you I could make diamonds. Must you really go?"

Mr. Krantz essayed to speak, but at the sight of Elinor's cool face, of Mr. Ashton's grim one, his voice failed him. Supported by his son, by Mr. Stern, he sagged slowly across the living room and out into the hall. When the door had closed behind them Donald turned to Elinor with a queer smile.

"Sometimes, Elinor," he exclaimed. "I think you're the devil."

"If I am," she grinned, "I hope I'm a good little devil."

"I think she's an angel," Miss Pennington whispered, taking Elinor's hand.

"I know darned well she is," said Ashton, and sweeping Jane into his arms, he kissed her quite shamelessly before them all.

ARTHUR J. REES

THE MISSING PASSENGER'S TRUNK

DINING apart in the station hotel after a stormy Channel crossing, I glanced down the amusements column of the evening newspaper the waiter had brought. But, in truth, it did little to help me to decide how to spend the first night of my return to my native land. I did not care particularly for any of the plays advertised; for a boxing match at the National Sporting Club I had still less desire. And yet, I shunned the prospects of a solitary evening with my own thoughts for company. What was I to do?

I stared dubiously into the blackness outside. My corner table was by a window, and through a chink in the drawn curtains I could see that the night was both foggy and wet. The street was plunged in gloom except for the foggy electric standards, and the faces of hurrying pedestrians drifted past the blurred window as pallid and phantasmal as a procession of disembodied souls. But, at least, they were bound somewhere, while I, in that cheerless public dining-room, was at a loose end. The other diners had departed, and I was now left there alone. Staring fixedly at the rain-streaked strip of window, I sat on.

It may have been the chill reminder of the weather that turned my thoughts to Colwin Grey. We had not met since the night when that infamous scoundrel, Dr. Penhyrn, cast himself headlong into a hissing Cornish sea, and Grey afterwards revealed the full measure of his iniquity to me in the dead man's lonely house.* That sinister adventure had happened three years before—not a great space of time, even in the span of human life; yet how much, in my own life, had come to pass since! My wife had died within

* "The Threshold of Fear."

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six months of our wedding day, and since her death I had spent a solitary and wandering existence abroad. Only three years! Incredible to think that so much happiness and loneliness and horror could be packed into such a brief period of time.

It was with the singular feeling of re-living in the past that I remembered Cornwall—and Grey. During the last three years Grey had not been much in my mind, but now I was back in England again. I wondered if he yet lived in the ancient legal court near Holborn, where the sparrows twittered in the plane-trees of the old flagged square. How well I recalled it, the peaceful court, the paved walks, the grey houses looking down on trees and lawn; such a place as you may find in London and nowhere else, almost as remote and secluded from the throb of London life as apart of the Essex Downs, and yet in the very heart of things. But of course Colwin Grey was still there! It was difficult to think of him anywhere else. In my mind he was as inseparably associated with that spot as the memory of Doctor Johnson is with Fleet Street.

And, suddenly, there came to me the desire to go and see him. We had been friends in former days, many years before, when I was a law student living in chambers, and he was in the first flush of that wonderful success which brought him the income of a successful K. C. In those days this rather surprised me, but I have learnt wisdom since. For if the orthodox legal path leads to fortune, why should fortune be denied a barrister who devotes his life to the search for truth? So the image of Grey beset me. I seemed to have a vision of him sitting alone over his dinner in the front room which stood behind iron railings and a three-cornered bit of a garden—the quietest room in London, I always thought it—waited on by the admirable Thorpe. And a wish, almost a longing, seized me to see him again.

And why not? To reach my old friend's chambers from Victoria was easy of accomplishment, and I was always sure of a warm welcome if he happened to be at home. It might be that he was out of town on one of his profes-

sional investigations, though I could ascertain that by ringing him up on the telephone. But I preferred to take him by surprise. At all events, there was nothing to prevent me going over to Holborn to see.

I ran up to my room for my hat and coat, descended, and left the hotel. The rain had ceased, and the yellow pall of the fog was lifting, so I determined to walk. From Victoria Street I crossed to the Strand by Trafalgar Square, and made my way towards Holborn through familiar side streets. As I walked reminiscences crowded thick around me, and past adventures with Corwin Grey lived before my eyes. It was in this quarter we had chased the notorious Red Vidal through the dingy precincts of Long Acre and Covent Garden, finally running him to earth in an underground passage near the Thames. And here, too, Grey had tracked to his dismal lodgings in Little Earl Street that wretched creature Morby, whose murder of Anthony Winderton, the distinguished Imperialist and statesman, Grey defined as a "pyschological crime."

Absorbed by these memories, I reached Holborn almost unconsciously, and turned down the dimly-lit thoroughfare in the direction of Gray's Inn Road. A light on the opposite side of the way showed me the old wine tavern with the narrow paved alley adjoining. I passed through the alley-way to Gables Court.

It was all silence and darkness within, and from dim doorways brooding shadows seemed to nod at me as I went by. The old buildings huddled behind railings housed a nest of lawyers in daytime, but they were all empty and deserted now, unless the ghosts of dead litigants wandered within. Grey's chambers were in a house around the corner, in a smaller court where the plane-trees grew. As I drew near I saw that the upper portion, occupied in the day as legal offices, was plunged in darkness, but light gleamed from the ground window underneath.

Footsteps sounded in the hall in answer to my bell and the door was opened by Thorpe: a Thorpe unchanged by the passage of time, with the same carefully-trimmed side-whiskers, the same full eye of unctuousness, mingled with

a wary experience of life. By the hall light he recognised me, and his plump bland face testified decorous approval.

"Good evening, Mr. Haldham. A pleasant surprise, sir! Will you come in?"

"Is Mr. Grey at home, Thorpe?"

"Yes, sir. He has just finished dinner. He will be glad to see you, I know."

Thorpe took my hat and coat, and preceded me to the familiar room where I had spent such pleasant nights, and quietly opened the door. "Mr. Richard Haldham, sir," he announced, and turned away.

Colwin Grey, unchanged, keen-eyed, thin-faced, restless and eager as of yore, sprang up to greet me, his dark eyes alight with a pleased surprise. He gripped my hand, and there was an unspoken sympathy and welcome in his smile which made me feel less lonely at once—the greeting of a man who understood.

"I am glad to see you, Haldham!" he said. "Take your old chair by the fire and tell me: are your wanderings over?"

"For the present, at any rate," I replied. "I returned from the South of France to-day—to London, and a November fog, but I have no immediate plans."

He eyed me attentively.

"You're not looking very fit, Haldham, and an aimless life in a London hotel is hardly likely to do you much good. If you have nothing better in view why not come and stay with me here?"

"Thanks awfully!" I said gratefully. "You are very kind, Grey, but I did not come to London to impose myself on you."

"It won't be imposing, my dear fellow. I shall be glad of your company, and you will be doing me a favour. A little companionship will be good for both of us, and Thorpe will be pleased to take you under his wing."

"I'm glad to hear it," I responded gaily; "and if that's the case I'll be delighted to stay with you."

"Excellent!" he replied. "I'll send Thorpe to the Victoria

for your luggage, and then we'll have a game of chess together, just to remind us of the old days."

So it was that I found a homecoming with Colwin Grey and a restful change from the chill loneliness of a strange hotel, sitting at ease in a cosy room with curtains drawn, the fire making a leaping chequer of red and white on the carpet at our feet. The chessmen were set out, but remained disregarded on the board. We were too absorbed in talk to disturb their battle array; many questions to be asked, and experiences to be exchanged. The lights, the fire, the pleasant room, and, above all, the company of Colwin Grey, added zest to the first happy evening I had known for years.

Time passed rapidly as we sat thus, and the thin strokes of a clock chiming eleven in the distance astonished me by the lateness of the hour. Hard upon it came another sound in the stillness of the court outside. Colwin Grey, telling me of a recent tragic and subtle case of his, heard it too, and stopped to listen. It was like footfalls following sharp and fast, as of a man running around the square for a wager. Twice they ceased and recommenced, each time coming nearer. There was something weird and strange to me in that unseen approach, but Colwin Grey only listened intently. Again the footsteps died away, then sounded loudly on the flagged path outside. The next moment the door bell rang. I exchanged glances with Grey.

"Our caller has been striking matches to look at the numbers on the doors as he came along," he said, with a smile. "That accounts for the pauses as he ran."

We heard the voice of Thorpe in parley at the door. Then he entered to us with a troubled face.

"There's a person in the hall who says he must see you, Mr. Grey."

"Who is he, Thorpe?"

"He would not give me his name. He's in a great mental tumult, sir, and acts like a demented being."

"You had better bring him in."

Thorpe bowed austerely and withdrew, to return almost immediately with a short and thick-set man of middle

age. The appearance of the visitor suggested the sea, and his blue serge suit was well made and smartly cut. His bearing might have been frank and engaging and seamanlike if it had not just then been that of a man in mortal extremity of terror. His bronzed cheeks were blanched, and his blue eyes were widened with the scared look of one who had beheld terrible things. Breathing heavily, he stared at us in silence for a moment, then plumped down on a chair and closed his eyes. I was taken aback at this strange behaviour, but Colwin Grey said, quietly:

"You have come fast and far, my friend."

"Ay; and so would you with the gallows striding at your heels," was the retort. "Is your name Grey—Colwin Grey?"

Grey nodded.

"I've come from Essex in the hope that you may be able to help me. I once read a story about you, and when this terrible thing happened I was in despair until I remembered your name. Then I took train to London, and came to your house. But I don't know that it's any use, after all. No one can save me from—from——" He broke off, the picture of despair.

"From what?" asked Grey.

"The hangman's rope," was the reply. Our visitor fingered his shirt-collar nervously, as if he already felt the vengeance of the law impeding his circulation.

"If you have committed murder no human skill can avail you," said Grey.

"But I haven't. As God is my judge, I'm an innocent man," said the other vehemently. "But the evidence against me is too damning and awful for anyone to believe me, let alone help me."

"You had better tell your story and allow me to judge of that," replied my friend.

"I am almost afraid to speak—to confide in anybody," was the hurried reply. "My story is too strange—too incredible—to be believed."

"If you are innocent you need have no fear, and it is

possible that I may be of service to you. Why did you come to me, otherwise?"

Our visitor put his hand to his head, like a man in mental perplexity.

"You are right," he said. "I came here for that purpose. You must excuse me, Mr. Colwin Grey, but I have had a most awful shock. However, I will tell you everything, in the hope that you may be able to help me."

He drew his chair round a little, looking at both of us.

"My name is Masters—Captain Samuel Masters," he commenced. "I don't suppose you've ever heard of me, but I'm fairly well known in my own walk of life, which is the sea. I command the steamer *Whiteaway,* an intermediate of ten thousand tons, 'Green Star' line, trading between Tilbury and Dominion ports in the wheat-carrying trade."

"What do you mean by an intermediate?" asked Grey.

"A cargo-carrier with accommodation for a few passengers—twenty, thirty, perhaps more. The *Whiteaway* has thirty passenger cabins, always bespoken in advance. Some people prefer travelling this way to a high-class liner, where they have to dress for dinner and conform to a more conventional etiquette. The intermediate is more free and easy. The *Whiteaway* has always been a popular boat in this respect, for I do my best to make my passengers comfortable.

"This homeward voyage the *Whiteaway* carried a full complement of passengers—globe-trotters, two Australian wool kings, some English ladies who had been to Rotorua for the hot springs treatment, a party of English sportsmen back from deer-stalking in the Wairapa, and an Anglo-Indian named Colonel Rackham, who had spent six months hunting sea lions in the Chatham Islands.

"We had a smooth passage across from Fremantle to Africa, and at Durban, where we coaled, another passenger came aboard, for whom a cabin had been reserved by a cable sent to the ship's agents at Wellington. He was Mr. Reginald Maitland, a wealthy collector, returning to England after travelling around the globe in search of

curiosities. He had been to China for tourmalin and to the South Seas for pink coral, then across to Auckland after kauri-gum curios. In New Zealand he read in the newspapers of some prehistoric reptile supposed to have been seen in an East African swamp, and he took the next boat to Africa to look for it. These things he told us before he had been aboard an hour, and, of course, he had to stand a lot of joking from the sportsman about the prehistoric reptile he hadn't shot, but he didn't seem to mind that a bit. He was a very pleasant little man, with taking ways, and he soon made friends with every one. I took a liking to him at once, and there sprang up a kind of friendship between us. He'd come on the bridge for a cigar and a talk, and yarn of the queer places he'd been in—at Lhassa, the forbidden city, for a silver Bhudda, among the cannibals of Solomon Islands after a witch-doctor's pointing bone, and so on. I know some out-of-the-way corners of the earth myself, but my experiences were nothing to Maitland's, who, according to his own account, seemed to have been everywhere a man might set his foot. He told me that his next expedition was to South America, where he was going to procure one of those small and shrunken human heads mummified by a process known only to the head hunters of the Amazon.

"After we passed Teneriffe, I observed a change in Maitland, and, being pretty friendly with him by this time, I asked him what the matter was. He told me he had had a curious kind of a vision a night or two before, in which a white-clad figure had risen from the surface of the sea to warn him that he was doomed to die before he reached England. I laughed at him for allowing himself to be affected by a dream, but for the rest of the day he was noticeably gloomy and depressed. And after dinner that night, when I was leaving the saloon to go on deck, he took me aside to ask me if he might speak to me alone in his cabin.

"I went with him to his state room. When we reached it he bolted the door and told me in a low tone that he was still worried and upset about his dream, and he asked

me to promise that if anything happened to him I would take charge of the box of curios in his cabin. He wished me to take them home until I could communicate with his only living relative, a sister living in North Wales, whose address he gave me. I endeavoured to rally him into a better frame of mind, but he seemed to have lost heart; so, in order to lessen his despondency, I promised, if occasion arose, to take his trunk to my house until I had an opportunity to forward it to his sister. He appeared very much happier and relieved at this assurance and thanked me warmly, informing me that I had taken a great load off his mind. We then left the cabin together.

"Perhaps I should tell you—not that it has any bearing on what happened afterwards—that while in the state room he opened his trunk and showed me some of the curios he had been collecting in his travels: a green-stone *tiki*, some wonderful snakeskins, a carved mother-of-pearl bird with ruby eyes—things like that. But what interested me most was a kauri-gum curio showing a small model of a fully rigged ship within. I had never seen so curious a specimen, and admired it greatly. When Maitland saw that I was taken with it, he insisted upon making me a present of it. I did not want to accept it, but he begged me to keep it as a memento of his pleasant voyage on the *Whiteaway*, adding that he had intended giving it to me when we arrived at Tilbury, but in view of his sinister dream he preferred me to have it then. I thanked him, and put it in my jacket pocket.

"Now comes the strangest part of my story. The night before we reached England, shortly before eight bells, the cry of 'Man overboard!' was raised. I was in my cabin at the time, and the first mate was on the bridge. It was a dark night with a fairly heavy sea running, and two of the passengers—Colonel Rackham and a Mr. Bingham—smoking a last cigar on the promenade deck, saw a deck-chair with what seemed to be a man's figure in it swept overboard, and raised the cry. Mr. Cherry—the mate—threw a lifebelt over and had flares lighted, but in the dark rough sea nothing could be seen, so he did not lower

a boat. He altered the steamer's course to circle round the spot at reduced speed, and sent for me. The first thing I did upon coming on deck, was to muster passengers and crew, and take a tally. It was then discovered that Maitland was missing—washed overboard, as was supposed. I cruised around for some time longer, flares out and siren hooting, and then, knowing that nothing further could be done, put the *Whiteaway* on her course again.

"When we reached Tilbury the following day the *Whiteaway* was boarded by detectives from Scotland Yard, who held up disembarkation while they looked over the passengers and examined the ship. They told me that a diamond worth nearly £20,000 had been stolen from the offices of the De Veere Diamond Mining Company at Johannesburg, and they were searching every ship touching at African ports on the homeward voyage. A gang of international diamond thieves had brought off the coup, and the thieves —or thief—were believed to be making their way to Amsterdam by way of England to dispose of the gem. When the detectives heard of my missing passenger they pricked up their ears, and insisted upon going to his state room to examine his belongings. But they found nothing suspicious there; so, after another look around the ship, they went on shore.

"After the passengers had passed through the Customs and left for London by train, I went ashore myself, with two of the seamen carrying Mr. Maitland's box. It was placed with my own luggage into a cab—not a taxi, but an old-fashioned four-wheeler. I got into the vehicle myself, and directed the cabman to drive me home.

"My house lies five miles from the docks near Grays, close to a lonely stretch of river marshes. As it happened, the place was empty. At Durban I had received a letter from my wife to say that her mother in Scotland was dangerously ill, and she had been compelled to go to her bedside. She did not expect to be back by the time the *Whiteaway* got in, but she wrote that I would find everything in order, and she had told the girl to run in every morning to look after me until she was able to return.

"We reached The Briars—that's the name of my little place—about seven o'clock, and the driver helped to carry the luggage inside. The passenger's trunk was rather heavy to lift, and the cabman grumbled about its weight. However, we got it into the sitting-room. I paid the man and he drove off.

"As the sound of his departing wheels died away I lit the gas in the dining-room, and found that the maid had laid supper there in anticipation of my return. Before sitting down to it, I went over the house to make sure that everything was safe. Returning downstairs, my eye fell upon the trunk of the missing passenger in the sitting-room, and I wondered what had made the confounded thing so heavy to lift. Maitland, on the strength of his foreboding, had insisted upon giving me one of his trunk keys, and I had slipped it on my own key-ring. As I stood looking down on the trunk the thought came to me to open it. Bringing out my bunch of keys—which I carry in my trousers pocket on a chain—I singled out the key, inserted it in the lock, and flung back the lid. My God, what a sight met my eyes! In the trunk lay a doubled-up body—the corpse of its owner, Mr. Maitland."

I uttered a startled exclamation. Colwin Grey did not speak, but the motionless intensity of his eyes revealed how deeply he was interested by our visitor's story. Captain Masters sighed, wiped the perspiration from his pale face with a trembling hand, and continued:—

"The face of the corpse was covered with blood, and the inside of the trunk was spattered with it. So far as I could see, the unfortunate man's throat had been cut savagely before his body was packed away into the box. But I was so horrified at the dreadful spectacle that I slammed down the lid hastily, and rushed from the house, almost distracted with fear. Slamming the door behind me, I wandered about the desolate river flats in the rain, wondering what to do in the horrible predicament in which I was placed. What possible explanation could I give of the murdered corpse of this passenger of my ship, brought home by me in the dead man's trunk to my own house?

Cold terror struck through me at the thought that even then I was carrying the key of that hideous trunk on my chain. Who would believe my story of what had happened? Certainly not an English judge and jury. In a delirium of despair I walked aimlessly for hours trying to plan some course of action, but without avail. Finally that story I had read of you came into my mind, and as a last resource I took train to London and came here, in the hope that you might be able to help me."

"You have acted wisely," said Grey. "Now I am going to ask you a few questions, and please be explicit in detail in your replies. Did anyone see Maitland off at Durban?"

"No; he came aboard alone."

"How long was it before you became friendly with him?"

"Shortly after leaving Durban. The odd places we had both been in made a kind of a bond between us, and we passed many a pleasant hour exchanging reminiscences. Poor fellow, I little dreamt then of the terrible fate in store for him." Captain Masters sighed heavily.

"Your feelings do you credit, captain. But, apart from the pleasant chats about little known parts of the world, did you ever talk with your passenger of anything else? Personal matters, for instance?"

"Once or twice. One day Mr. Maitland asked me where I lived ashore, and said he had a lonely man's envy for anyone with wife and home. I laughingly replied that married men were sometimes as badly off as bachelors, adding that this trip I was returning to an empty house. He asked me why, and I told him of the letter my wife had sent to Durban."

"Could any of the other passengers have overheard that conversation?"

"No; we were on the bridge at the time."

Colwin Grey nodded thoughtfully. "On the night Maitland took you to his state room to tell you of his dream, did you take notice of his trunk?"

"Not specially, I glanced casually at it when he opened it, but that was all. I observed that the upper part or tray

was full of what I took to be curios, carefully wrapped in tissue paper."

"Did he lift out the tray?"

"No; he took out a few curios to show me, and then put them back again. After he had given me the curio I told you of he locked up the trunk, and we left the cabin."

"Ah! That kauri-gum curio strikes me as an interesting feature of the case. I wish you had brought it with you. I should like to see it."

"By chance I did. Maitland advised me to carry it ashore myself because it was fragile and easily broken. I did so, intending to put it under a glass case when I got home, but in the shock of my discovery I rushed out of the house with it still in my pocket."

"Capital!" said Grey. "Let us see it."

From his pocket our visitor produced a spherical object like a large india-rubber ball wrapped in tissue paper. From this covering he extracted a yellowish-brown spheroid, highly polished and transparent as crystal, with an object resembling the model of a small sailing ship in its interior. Colwin Grey examined the curio closely, then took down a book from the bookcase, and turned over the leaves.

"Kauri," he muttered. "Ah! here it is. 'Kauri or Cowry, or kauri-pine, n. Maori name for the tree *Agathis australis*, Sal. (formerly Dammara A.) *N.O. Coniferæ*. Variously spelt, and earlier often called *Cowdie*. Kauri-gum, n. the resin which exudes from the *Kauri* (q.v.) used in making varnish.'"

"Yes," said Captain Masters, "and it makes the best varnish in the world. There were a colony of gum-diggers —mostly Austrians—in New Zealand before the war. The gum falls into the ground as the trees die, and, not being soluble in water, remains there. The diggers tap likely places with long pointed sticks, and if they find small pieces of gum sticking to the end of the spear they start to dig. And every gum-field yields a few curios formed by the liquid gum fossilizing around some object in the earth, which sometimes takes a strange shape in the lump of gum.

The gum-diggers look out for these, and sell them to dealers at a higher price—from £5 to £10 for a good one. I remember seeing one piece in a shop near the Auckland Museum for which the shopkeeper asked £50. It was cut and polished like a diamond, with an angel's figure with outstretched wings inside."

During this explanation Grey had been examining the curio through a lens. He put down the glass and looked at Captain Masters.

"I suppose the Customs officers did not bother to go through your luggage when you landed?" he said.

"They know me too well for that," said Captain Masters. "They know I wouldn't dream of evading the law. Yesterday one of the examiners, who is a friend of mine, jocularly asked me if I had anything to declare. I invited him with a laugh to look through my belongings and see. God knows what I should have done had he taken me at my word and opened Maitland's trunk." Captain Masters shuddered at the thought.

"And yet, according to your story, the body was not there when the detectives examined the trunk in the cabin," said Grey.

"That is the strange part of it. I know it wasn't."

"Why are you so sure?"

"The detectives lifted out the tray to go through the trunk."

"And what was underneath?"

"Merely clothes and personal effects."

"Yet the body must have been in the trunk when it was carried off the ship?"

"There can be no doubt of that."

"Interesting, very! One more question, Captain Masters. The *Whiteaway* carries wireless, I suppose?"

"She does."

"Did you receive a wireless message to the effect that the ship was to be searched by detectives at Tilbury?"

Captain Masters hesitated. "I *did* receive a message by wireless, but it was confidential," he said.

"Quite so, but we can imagine what it contained. Did

you speak of this message to anyone aboard—Maitland or anybody else?"

"Certainly not," answered Captain Masters, reddening. "I have already said the wireless was confidential."

"And you say that Maitland's throat was cut?"

"I believe so, though I didn't stop to investigate. The sight of his blood-stained body gave me such a shock that I let fall the lid with a cry, and bolted out of the house."

"An action quite understandable, all things considered," commented Grey suavely. "Altogether, a very strange and unusual case. What do you think, Haldham? Have you any theory to advance—any suggestion to make?"

I hesitated, then said:

"It seems to me that the passenger Maitland must have been murdered aboard the *Whiteaway*, and the cry of 'Man overboard!' raised by an accomplice to give the murderer an opportunity to conceal the body in the trunk."

"But the body wasn't in the trunk when the detectives searched it at Tilbury," Colwin Grey replied. "I'm afraid that theory won't do, though it is fairly certain that the cry of 'Man overboard!' was raised merely as a blind for some deeper purpose. However, theories are rather premature until we know more of the facts, and those facts, unless I am very much mistaken, are to be found in Captain Masters' house in Essex—or, to speak accurately, in the package of grim luggage which the captain conveyed to his home in a four-wheeled cab. I propose to return with him and look into this matter. Will you drive us down in my car, Haldham?"

"Certainly," I replied.

"Then let us start at once. I've the fancy that the less time we lose the better. And with Captain Masters' permission I will take care of his curio for the present."

He wrapped the kauri-gum in its tissue paper, and dropped it in his pocket. We then left the house. Colwin Grey kept his car in a garage off Theobalds Road, and thither we directed our steps. Crossing the road, we encountered a police constable beneath the arc-light, who nodded to my friend. "A wet night, Mr. Grey!" he said

cheerily. Captain Masters shrank closer to my side, but the burly policeman did not even glance at him. Entering the garage, we obtained the car from a sleepy and shock-headed youth, and set out for Essex.

We drove through the empty streets of London in silence. I could see by the set expression of Colwin Grey's face that he was thinking deeply, and in no mood for words. Nevertheless, I would have liked to know what his thoughts were about this strange adventure upon which we were embarked, for I had the feeling that his wonderful faculties had reached some definite conclusion about a mystery which was shrouded in sinister darkness to me. Captain Masters sat huddled in his seat, the picture of misery and despair, though from time to time he aroused himself sufficiently to give me a direction as to the route.

In this fashion we drove through the silent countryside until we reached a small rural town near the river. Captain Masters indicated a lonely dark road with half a dozen houses, and told me in a low tone that The Briars was the last on the left.

"Then we had better leave the car on this open ground," said Grey. "I do not want to take it up to the house."

We left the car and proceeded up the street. The Briars was isolated, with river flats around it and the river beyond. The place looked gloomy, but a chink of light fell from the fanlight upon a large tree with spreading branches which threw a dark shadow between us and the house.

In silence we walked down the garden path, my own nerves unpleasantly tense at the thought of the grim thing which lay awaiting us within. Captain Masters bent down to the door with his key, and I heard the faint click of the lock. Next moment we stood in the dimly lighted hall, and I heard the captain say something about having left on the gas in the sitting-room. Followed the sound of a match scraped across a box, and Captain Masters, cupping the light in his hands, nodded to a door gaping blackly off the passage. "It's in there," he whispered.

We understood, and followed him in. The captain

fumbled with the gas jet above him, and a flame of gas flared noisily above our heads. In the light a large travelling trunk confronted us, dark-brown and oblong, plastered with steamer labels. Colwin Grey advanced towards it, and as he did so I saw with amazement that he held a revolver in his hand. Then my eyes went back to the box, waiting in suspense for the horrible contents to be revealed. Grey bent over and flung back the lid. The trunk was empty.

The effect of this discovery upon Captain Masters was stupendous. He uttered one loud cry of deadliest terror, and stared with open mouth at Colwin Grey and myself, as though he suspected us of spiriting the body away. At length he found words.

"The body was there, I'll swear," he stammered. "I saw it—I saw the blood——"

"Oh, the blood is still there," said Grey coolly, then murmured to himself: "Very neat, very ingenious! I don't think I've ever come across a cleverer piece of work."

Captain Masters and myself could only stare at him in bewilderment as he bent over the empty box, examining it carefully. He rose to his feet with an unusual light in his eye.

"Well, Captain Masters," he said, "you have brought us here on a wild-goose chase with your story of a corpse in a box. Next time you come home after a long sea voyage I hope you'll examine your luggage more carefully before disturbing me with such preposterous nonsense!"

He uttered these words in a loud harsh tone, regarding the unhappy captain with angry face. The captain sought to utter a rueful apology, but Colwin Grey cut him short by declaring, in the same emphatic voice, that he was going home. He made for the door as he spoke, with the dismayed captain still murmuring excuses at his heels. I came in their rear, lost in amazement at this inexplicable conclusion of a strange affair. In this fashion we reached the door, but the instant we were in the open air Grey's manner immediately changed.

"Quick! Let us creep back into the house again without a sound. Captain Masters, you go in first, turn off the gas,

and keep quiet. Haldham, I want you to stand guard over the front door. Then leave the rest to me. But, mind—not a whisper, not a sound!"

I nodded without understanding in the least, and I saw by Captain Master's amazed face that he was equally in the dark as he crept back into the house to carry out his instructions. As the lights disappeared Colwin Grey and myself followed him in. I crouched down in the hall, near the door, to await events.

Time passed heavily as I waited there, wondering what all this meant. The silence was so intense that somewhere in the house I heard a clock telling off the seconds with hurried tick, and presently it struck the hour of two with a metallic chime. The more I reflected upon Captain Masters' story and its outcome, the more puzzled I became. What could it all mean? What had become of the body he had brought ashore in the trunk, and where had it disappeared? I had visions of the dead flesh moving awfully through the darkness of the empty house, looking into shrouded rooms, listening and peering in the stillness with sightless eyes.

And then I actually did hear the sound of a door creaking overhead. I listened intently, with the feeling that perhaps my imagination was playing tricks. But no! For my ears next caught distinctly, the soft pad of stockinged feet, as if someone was creeping stealthily downstairs. My eyes vainly sought to pierce the darkness as I listened, wondering whether either of my companions had heard. The next moment Colwin Grey's voice broke the silence sharply.

"The door, Haldham! Watch the door!"

A deafening report followed hard on his words, and in the flash which accompanied it I saw a small figure crouching by the foot of the stairs, revolver in hand. The man made a rush as I saw him, but at the same instant the lithe, active form of Grey sprang upon him and bore him down. There was the sound of a scuffle in the darkness, and then Colwin Grey's voice broke the silence again.

"Light the gas, somebody!"

I hastened to comply, and the lighted hall showed a

small writhing figure in my friend's grasp. At the sight of the little man with a blotched red face Captain Masters gave a loud cry, like one who saw a ghost.

"Maitland!" he cried; "Mr. Maitland, as I live! Oh, thank God you are not murdered!"

The grotesque figure with the spotted face ceased struggling and gave him an ugly look.

"I'd like to kill you for an old fool!" he snarled.

"Come, Maitland, this is really very ungrateful on your part," said Colwin Grey, "considering the trouble Captain Masters has been put to in helping you to escape. True, it was involuntary on his part, but that does not lessen your debt. I am surprised at you."

Captain Masters looked from one to the other like a man unable to credit his senses.

"I don't understand this," he faltered. "I found Mr. Maitland with his throat cut, in that box." He pointed with a shudder to the empty trunk. "Now I see him——"

"You imagined you found him there with his throat cut," interposed Colwin Grey. "What you actually did see was a man simulating death to deceive anyone who might peep into the trunk—though the pose was principally for your benefit."

"But the blood?" said Captain Masters, apparently only half-convinced.

"Colouring matter—a mere trick," returned Grey contemptuously. "You will observe that it is already beginning to wear off, giving your friend Maitland a singular spotted appearance not unlike a red leopard."

"Well, thanks to you, Mr. Grey, I'm no longer in danger of being arrested as his murderer," said the captain, in a heart-felt tone. But what did he do this for—that's what I want to know. Was it a joke? If so, it's not my idea of one. In fact, it strikes me as a very ungentlemanly thing for a *Whiteaway* passenger to do."

"Most ungentlemanly," said Colwin Grey gravely. "But, then, Mr. Maitland can hardly lay claim to the title of a gentleman. No gentleman has aliases, and Mr. Maitland has several: quite a number, in fact. The most notorious

is one by which he is now being searched for by the police of three countries—Richard Denton, better known as Dick the Galloper, international diamond thief, wanted for the theft of a blue diamond, worth £20,000, stolen from the De Veere Mining Company's offices in Johannesburg a month ago."

"But where——"

The sound of heavy footsteps in the hall broke into the colloquy, and the next moment two uniformed police officers were staring in suspiciously upon us. They entered the room, but at the sight of Grey the face of one of them cleared.

"Why, Mr. Colwin Grey, we didn't expect to find you here," he said. "Someone came to the station just now with a story of revolver shots at The Briars, so we hurried along. What is the trouble, and who is that chap you have hold of?"

"A gentleman from Durban, Stone, who calls himself Maitland—Mr. Reginald Maitland. It is by that name he appears on the passenger list of the steamer *Whiteaway*, by which he travelled to this country. But I fancy he is better known in police circles as Richard Denton, otherwise Dick the Galloper."

"Dick the Galloper!" exclaimed Sergeant Stone. "Well, this *is* a stroke of luck. The De Veere Company have offered a reward of £200 for his arrest. I wonder if he has the diamond in his possession?"

"I do not think you will find it on him," said Colwin Grey. "Still, it may not be hidden away so carefully that we need altogether despair of recovering it. If I get on the track of it I'll let you know at once."

"Thank you, Mr. Grey," said Sergeant Stone. "There's a big reward out for its recovery. And I'll search this chap thoroughly as soon as I have him under lock and key. It is possible he may have it hidden about him."

For the first time I caught the gleam of a sneering smile upon the prisoner's face. It passed, leaving him dejected as before. Sergeant Stone stepped closer and slipped handcuffs on him.

"I'd like to know how you ran across the Galloper, Mr. Grey," he said.

"It's a strange story, Stone, but I'm afraid I must leave it for the soi-disant Mr. Maitland to relate. We must be getting back to London. Good night! Come, Haldham."

An hour later Grey and I were back in our quiet room, drinking coffee prepared by the excellent Thorpe, who had waited up for our return. And I had no desire for sleep until I had heard from my companion's lips how he had arrived at his conclusions in this remarkable case.

"I reached them while Captain Masters was telling his story," he replied, pouring himself out another cup of coffee. "From the outset it was apparent to me that Maitland—to call him so—had an ulterior motive in making himself agreeable to the captain of the *Whiteaway,* and he ingratiated himself with a flow of pleasant talk and the gift of the curio, which Captain Masters obviously coveted. It is a curious point that so companionable a man as Maitland left Durban without a friend to see him off; but he had his own reasons for being alone, as he had for insinuating himself into the good graces of the simple commander of the *Whiteaway.* And although Captain Masters denies it, I fancy Maitland was astute enough to extract something in the course of their intimate talks about that wireless communication from Scotland Yard. Even if he didn't, the diamond thief would have a pretty shrewd notion that the ship was bound to be searched at Tilbury, and he made his plans accordingly. The night before England was reached he carried out the 'Man overboard' trick by means of a deck-chair and an overcoat. He then hid himself away—probably in one of the boats hanging over the side—until the detectives had boarded the *Whiteaway* at Tilbury Docks and inspected the passengers. Afterwards it was an easy matter for him, in the bustle of the ship's arrival, to slip down unnoticed into his state room, throw the contents of his trunk through the porthole, and hide away in it. At The Briars I observed that the trunk had several air-holes for breathing bored in it, and locked with

an automatic catch which could be manipulated from inside. Even after the detectives had left the ship, Maitland did not dare to take the risk of walking ashore, for several reasons. No one knew better than he that although the Scotland Yard men had gone off, there would be a couple of them waiting at the foot of the gangway to watch the passengers disembark. There was also the risk of some of his fellow-passengers recognizing the resurrected drowned man, and raising an outcry. Another reason was that he did not wish to part company with Captain Masters."

I did not understand the last reason, but my mind turned to another point.

"But the pretended gash in the throat, and the blood-stains," I asked. "What was the idea of that trick?"

"For one thing, Maitland had to reckon with the chance of the trunk being opened or looked into before it reached The Briars."

"I don't see how that applies," I rejoined.

"In this way. The sight of a man crouching in a trunk would arouse suspicion and almost certain capture, but a supposed blood-stained corpse would cause the discoverer to recoil in horror and look for a police constable, thus giving the corpse a chance to make good his escape. But principally Maitland counted upon Masters opening the trunk and rushing away in horror when he saw what was inside. If Captain Masters hadn't done so he would have come out of the trunk himself during the night. Whatever happened did not matter to him, so long as he achieved his end. But I fancy Maitland foresaw that Captain Masters would act exactly as he did, and leave him alone in The Briars."

"Leave him alone for what?"

"To regain the curio he gave him aboard the *Whiteaway*. He did not foresee that Captain Masters would carry it away with him."

"Why should Maitland want the curio?"

"My dear fellow, is it possible that you do not see?"

I reddened a little at his amused tone. "No, I do not,"

I rejoined. "I must confess that you go too deep for me."

"Well, perhaps I am wrong," he said with a smile. "However, we still have the curio, so let us look at it again." He drew it forth as he spoke, and after a brief examination of it, handed his glass to me. "Can you see a faint mark on the polished surface of the gum?"

"Yes; an almost invisible crack."

"Call it a crack if you like, but to me it is more like an invisible join, as if the curio had been joined with spirit gum. But, according to Captain Masters, these curios are natural formations—pieces of fossilized kauri-gum which are found in the ground. Let us investigate this one, and see. There is a small hammer in that drawer behind you, Haldham. Will you pass it to me?"

I did so, and he struck the curio a sharp blow, shattering it. Bending eagerly over the fragments, he rose with a small piece of cotton-wool in his hand. Unrolling this carefully, he placed upon the table a glittering stone which sent forth flashing blue rays in the rosy firelight glow.

"A diamond!" I cried.

"The De Veere blue diamond, worth nearly £20,000," said my companion. "Not so large as the famous Hope blue diamond, but a very magnificent stone, nevertheless. Observe how it has been cut in an irregular rosette to show off its wonderful blue fire! An ingenious hiding-place, was it not?—as ingenious as that chosen by the thief. If Captain Masters had not forgotten to take the curio from his pocket when he went home we should never have seen the diamond or Maitland again. As I conjectured, he waited in The Briars for Masters to return, and thus we were lucky enough to lay hands upon both. Maitland suffered from a modern fault. He over-reached himself by being just a little too clever. And now, before we go to bed, Haldham, I had better ring up Scotland Yard and tell them to send round for the diamond. It is better in their possession than ours, even though Maitland is under lock and key."

ARTHUR J. REES

THE FINGER OF DEATH

I

I SHALL ask Phyllis Leslie to tell the first part of this strange tale in her own words. She came to Hangletree as an orphan girl of twenty-two to live with her crippled uncle, Simon of Hangletree, in his remote old house on the Sussex Downs. Not only was he disabled physically and confined to his room, but mentally and morally he was infirm. His elderly serving man, Mockett, and an old woman housekeeper named Rhoda were the only other inmates of the place,—not a cheerful household for a young girl.

Hither came Philip Arnold, an illegitimate son of Simon, the offspring of a liaison between him and a village girl, Sophie Arnold, some twenty-five years before. Philip had forced his way up to his father's room, and Phyllis, sitting alone in another room, found herself listening—listening intently—in the silence and glimmering light. Now she tells of what she heard and saw:

The sound of unfamiliar footsteps reached me, falling oddly in the stillness of the house. I listened to them nervously, for they seemed to be ascending the stairs. Who could the visitor be? The thought that I was alone in the gathering darkness braced me to go and see. Quietly I crossed the room and opened my door. Along the passage I went quickly, and looked down the unlighted corridor at the end.

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With a numb sensation of unhappiness my eyes took in a figure advancing from the head of the stairs. I knew it instantly for Philip, and perhaps the feeling which swept over me was a portent of the significance of his visit there. He passed down the corridor with swift, light tread, and paused outside my uncle's door. I saw his hand go out to the ancient brass door-handle and press it down. Then he opened the door wide, and entered the room.

"Do you recognise me?"

I heard these words clearly where I stood. There was something in the tone of the curt question which startled me, and quickened my senses with fear. Hurriedly I crept along the corridor to an old oaken chest, where I crouched, looking through the half-open door at the scene within. Philip, with his back towards me, stood just inside the room, his gaze directed towards the distant, drooping figure of my uncle in his high-backed chair. From my place of concealment in the corridor they appeared like two rigid silhouettes outlined against the shadowy gloaming of the room. The stillness was intense, and the ticking of the silver clock on the mantelpiece reached me distinctly as I crouched there. There was a moment's silence, then Philip spoke again.

"Do you not know me? I am your son."

My heart leapt. Breathlessly I moved a little closer to the door.

"I have come to see you, though I feel that I loathe you. But now I am determined to have justice, for my dead mother's sake. You have shown yourself a coward all through. Can you explain your conduct to me, now that I am here?"

Philip advanced further into the room as he said this, but neither by word nor gesture did my uncle show that he was aware of his presence there. He seemed to sit listlessly forward, huddled in his great chair, his head bent and drooping, as if he were studying the pattern of the carpet at his feet. It was the attitude in which I had first seen him when I came to Hangletree.

"Speak!" cried Philip. "Silence will not serve you now. You must speak. You cannot ignore me any longer."

He took another step nearer, but my uncle did not move. His head still inclined forward, like a man in deep thought, and his right arm was stretched out upon the table by his side. A ray of dying light flickered across the mahogany, and flashed upon something bright and shining in his thin, white hand. The sight of that gleaming weapon in his fingers held my vision to the exclusion of everything else.

"He will shoot you! Oh, take care!"

These words seemed wrenched from me in a cold agony of fear, but I did not know then if my dry lips uttered any sound. The next instant two shots rang out with deafening clamour in the stillness of the room. From two weapons two flashes came almost together, but I had seen that the first had flamed from the hand of my uncle, seated in his chair. My eyes turned towards Philip. He stood there motionless, and I was suddenly aware of a revolver in his hand which had not been there before. With face turned away from me, he was staring in dazed fashion at my uncle's immobile form.

I should have gone in to him then if my eyes had not caught another figure advancing along the corridor in the dusk. It was Mockett, walking swiftly towards the door of the room. Had he looked down as he approached he might have seen me crouching there, but he made straight for the open door and went in. From my hiding-place I saw him recoil at the sight of Philip within.

"You!" he cried, "why, how did you come here?"

"I walked up stairs," said Philip simply.

"I don't mean that," said Mockett, with a stare; "but how did you force your way into this room?"

"I opened the door and walked in."

"That cannot be!" exclaimed Mockett, sharply. "The door was locked."

"I found it closed, but it opened when I pressed the handle," replied Philip, in the same dazed way.

Mockett regarded him inscrutably, like a man consider-

ing some deep problem in his mind. His eyes travelled slowly from Philip's face to the revolver, which now hung, relaxed, in his right hand.

"You fired a shot," he said; "I heard it downstairs."

"You heard two shots," rejoined Philip, quickly. "Mr. Simon fired at me first."

Again Mockett looked at him thoughtfully, as though weighing what he said. Then, as if struck by a sudden thought, he crossed the room swiftly and knelt down by my uncle in his chair. I saw him bend over him, and place his hand within his breast. He withdrew his hand hastily, with a hoarse cry.

"Light!" he cried, in a quavering voice; "we must have light here." He struck a match quickly, snatched the lamp from the table, and lit it with a shaking hand. When the lamp burnt clearly he turned to the seated figure of my uncle again. The next instant he rose to his feet.

"God help us!" he said, solemnly, "Mr. Simon is dead."

At these words I felt all the blood go from my face. Involuntarily I looked towards Philip, to see what he would do. He did not speak immediately, but his eyes fastened on Mockett's face, in a stupid and wondering stare.

"Dead?" he said faintly, at last. "No, no, it cannot be. I fired at him—I admit it; but that was only because he fired at me first. I did not want to kill him, or to hurt him in any way."

"That may be"—Mockett's voice sounded grim—"but dead he is, nevertheless. He has been shot through the body."

With the hand which had felt the wound he made a gesture towards my uncle's figure in the chair. Slowly Philip went forward to Mockett's side. In the circle of lamplight they stood together; I saw Philip's white and saddened face, and the scar on Mockett's features throbbing red. The light fell upon the table and the still hand clasping the revolver there. From the weapon's muzzle a thin wisp of smoke curled upward and faded in the gloom. Some moments passed before Mockett spoke again.

"He is dead," he said, "look for yourself and see."

Philip did not move or look. "He was my father," he muttered, so low that the words just reached me outside.

Mockett regarded him with a frown.

"You told me that last night," he said, "but your story needs more explaining now. Simon of Hangletree was never married—as I also told you then."

"That may be so, but he was my father, nevertheless."

The reply was almost whispered by Philip's white lips, and he stood there like a man in a dream. Mockett looked at him gravely. Throughout that scene the old man was the more dominant personality of the two. His face was stern and thoughtful in the feeble light. From Philip his eyes went towards that unstirring shape in the chair.

"You know what this means?" he said at length.

"I do," replied Philip simply. "I am in your hands."

Mockett showed no sign of having heard. Again his eye wandered irresolutely from the living to the dead; then back to Philip.

"You had best tell me what happened," he said.

"It was an accident," Philip answered quickly, "I swear it before God. I did not come here to kill him. I—I——. Oh, what is it that I have done?"

"The revolver?" persisted Mockett. "How came you here with that?"

I saw Philip look down, staring foolishly at the weapon in his hand.

"I tell you it was an accident," he cried, a little wildly now.

"You have already said so," rejoined Mockett; "but, accident or not, Mr. Simon is dead."

"If he is," said the other passionately, "I fired in self-defence. A mad impulse and a chance shot! I ask you to remember that."

"Calm yourself," said Mockett warningly; "there are others in the house."

"What does that matter?" retorted Philip recklessly. "Soon all the world must know."

"Still, let us take counsel about it quietly," went on Mockett, with the same serious air.

Philip stared at him broodingly, like a man suspecting some trap.

"Why do you say that?" he murmured. "What is there —now—to discuss?"

"I ask you to be calm, and tell me more about yourself."

Passively Philip looked at him, and then began to talk, but in a subdued voice which did not reach me where I was concealed. I watched Mockett move closer to him in the circle of light, as if he also had difficulty to hear. For some minutes that murmured communication went on, then ceased abruptly as it had begun. I saw the resignation of Philip's attitude and the misery of his look, as he stood with his hands clasped tightly before him, as though waiting for his companion to pass judgment on what he had just said. After a pause Mockett spoke.

"Well," he said, "villain he may have been, but the man is dead. And that by a deliberate act of blood, such as is accounted murder in men's eyes."

"I know it," answered Philip, sombrely. "And because of it I must pay the price."

"Wait!" exclaimed Mockett, austerely. "It is I who have the word in this. There are times in life when a man must take justice into his own hands. If your story is true, you are a cruelly wronged and unhappy young man. Excuses must be made for you: other things taken into account. Mr. Simon fired at you first, you say. Who will believe you in this—except myself? You forced your way to his room, and that with a weapon in your hand. Think what that means if you have to stand your trial! He ruined your mother's life, you say. I, who accept your story, agree that if he did this he deserved death. But what jury—or what judge—will look at it in that way? God has placed the scales of justice in my hands, and made me the judge of this thing."

He spoke solemnly, and Philip listened like one transfixed, as though drinking in the other's words. I heard them and breathlessly, wondered what they portended, and

what Mockett intended to do. It was a strange scene to gaze upon; the two grave and living faces in the flickering glow of light and behind them the drooping figure in the chair, one hand still resting listlessly on the table by its side. But my interest was with the living just then. In the sombre stillness of the room I heard Philip's voice at last.

"What does all this avail?" he asked in rather a weary voice. "This cannot be concealed, whatever you may say, and I must take the punishment which is my due."

Dismay fell upon my soul. Why did he reply like this, and strike away the hand—which, as it seemed to me—had been held out in help? Anxiously I awaited Mockett's reply.

"Who is to say what punishment is your due?" he answered in a cold voice, and I could have blessed him for his words. "Mr. Simon is dead, and your punishment will not restore him to life. If your story is the truth, death was his merited due."

"I have spoken the truth," replied Philip, "but how does that help me here? His death must be made known."

"It must be known," said Mockett deliberately; "but it need not be made known at once."

Philip raised his head and looked at him.

"What do you mean?" he said.

"Listen!" replied Mockett gravely. "I want to deal fairly with you. It may have been God's will to destroy this man for his sins. If so, it is not for me to hand you over to the law. Law and justice—what are they? Mere words: a phrase of the human brain! How could human justice ever redress the balance of wrong-doing in this world? The law can punish wrongdoers, but the worst offenders escape. And who can say where lies right or wrong? As I think thus, I'll be no party to helping so-called human justice in your case."

"Then what do you propose to do?"

I heard these words anxiously, and, trembling, listened for Mockett's reply. For a moment he paused before he spoke.

"I propose to help you to escape."

His tone thrilled me, though I was unable to gauge all it meant. With an effort Philip said:

"In what way?"

"It is now nearly seven," Mockett's hand pointed towards the face of the mantelpiece clock. "Mr. Simon was accustomed to having his breakfast every morning at nine. I shall do nothing until then."

"What do you mean?" With difficulty I caught the faintly uttered reply.

"To nine o'clock in the morning is fourteen hours," Mockett answered. "I intend to give you that period in which to make good your escape. At that hour Mr. Simon's breakfast will be brought up to him as usual, and he will be found lying dead in his chair. Until that moment you are free, with nothing to fear so far as the law of England is concerned. After nine o'clock you will be a hunted man. Whether you ultimately escaped will depend to a great great extent upon the sagacity of the officers of the law called in. But at least you will have had your chance."

I saw Philip throw out his hands.

"Why should you do this for me?" he asked.

"Because I want to help you," replied the other sternly; "or it may be that I am not thinking of you at all, but of the abstract justice of the case. My conscience must be my guide, and through it I am responsible to God. It was a quarrel, you say, in which the dead man fired first. It was not——"

"Murder?" interrupted Philip, as the older man came to a pause upon the word. "No; it was not. I will swear to that if you wish."

"I believe you," responded Mockett brusquely. "Time goes, and you have none of it to waste. Each minute you spend here lessens your chance of escape. Come, you had better go, and quickly, too. The open downs—and darkness—are before you. At least they will hide you for the night. By morning you should be far away. More than that I cannot do for you."

"It is more—far more—than I had the right to ex-

pect," said Philip. "You have put me under a debt which I can never hope to repay. How can I show my gratitude?"

"You can best prove your gratitude by going at once," retorted Mockett impatiently. "Come! we have already wasted far too much time."

Lamp in hand, he turned, moving towards the door as he spoke. Nervously I crouched closer to the wall, behind the old oak chest. From my refuge I watched them go forth, the lamp shining full across Mockett's scarred face and on Philip's bent head. They paused in the corridor like conspirators, listening and looking towards the stairs, while I held my breath. With a nod of his head Mockett indicated that the way was clear. Quietly they went along to the staircase and down by the dragons and bears. The light grew smaller as they descended, and finally vanished in the gloom beneath.

It was now quite dark in the corridor. From my shelter I came out cautiously, and stood looking towards the stairs. A faint sound ascended from below, like the stealthy opening of a door. Dully I wondered if it was Mockett, letting Philip out. I stole along to a window and looked down upon the gravel path.

Night stared in at the window, illumined by a wan crescent of a moon. Looking out, I saw two figures emerge from the porch, and make their way towards the pond by the trees. They seemed to confer there a moment, whispering, then one returned to the house. I heard the front door close, and the subdued rattle of the door chain. But my eyes were on the figure of Philip, standing as if in a reverie by the pool. As I looked he turned away, crossed the garden quickly, and mounted the slope. My eyes followed his progress across the moonlit downs until he vanished from my sight.

II

Philip Arnold did not escape. He was arrested, charged with murder, and, after pleading guilty, was sentenced to

ten years penal servitude. Phyllis lived on, alone, at Hangletree, bequeathed to her by her uncle. She still loved Philip and studied how to free him from what she intuitively felt was an unjust imprisonment.

Three years later Rhoda, her uncle's old house servant, revealed to Phillis that she had heard an earlier shot in Simon of Hangletree's bedroom on the day that he was killed. Phyllis came at once to London to consult Colwin Grey, a barrister of Grey's Inn, who had been an intimate friend of her dead uncle. To him she related her story and the tale of the servant Rhoda. That is how I became familiar with the affair. Grey asked me to go with him to Hangletree to assist him in an investigation. He soon extracted a confession from Mockett that it was he who had shot Simon in revenge because Sophie Arnold, Philip's mother, was his sweetheart before Simon seduced her. Mockett asserted that Simon was already dead when his son forced his way into his room. If so, how could they have exchanged shots, as Phillis Leslie, looking through the half-opened door saw?

I was an eye-witness to the remarkable test by which Colwin Grey brought the truth to light.

I have but a hazy recollection of the passing of that day. Soon after a solitary breakfast I went out upon the downs. Colwin Grey was shut in his room, and Mockett I did not see. Within the walls of Hangletree tragedy seemed to brood, and I was conscious of an intense desire for the open air. Far and fast I walked, without sense of direction or desire for food. But the downs and their serenity brought no balm of peace to me. Mockett's dreadful story ran incessantly in my head. I fancied myself back in the library listening to it once more. I could not believe it, yet dared not altogether doubt, for to do so was to cause my thoughts to flit towards some explanation more monstrous still. Desperately I sought to thrust the story from me, but it returned with added force. Throughout that day like a living apparition, it accompanied me wherever I went.

Late afternoon still saw me wandering on the downs, oblivious of my surroundings and the flight of time. Then I was recalled to myself by the gradual fading of the light. With a start I realised the lateness of the hour, for twilight was falling like a veil upon the downs. Looking around me carefully, I recognised a group of trees, and knew that Hangletree was not very far away. Unconsciously my footsteps had been taking me back. I walked quickly, and before long the house came into view. In the fading light of dusk it stood out against the sky. I went down the slope towards it at a slower pace.

To my surprise I saw Colwin Grey in the garden, standing motionless in the ancient enshadowed space. But as I drew near he came towards me, mounting the flagged and terraced steps. In the dim light his face looked grave.

"I have been waiting for you, Haldham," he said.

"I am sorry I have been so long away," I said. "I went for a walk, and quite forgot the time."

He nodded absently.

"Haldham," he said in a low tone, "there has been another tragedy in this unhappy house. Mockett is dead."

"Dead!" I gasped; then, with a sudden thought: "Not—not——"

My voice trailed off. In the dusk of the garden our eyes met. Grey understood me, and shook his head.

"No," he replied solemnly—"at least, I do not think so. It was more probably a heart attack, I should say. But it is very strange, all the same. I found him in the panelled room seated in the chair where Simon of Hangletree died. Come with me to the room now, Haldham. I have much to explain to you."

We went through the garden, crossed the lawn, and entered the house. Our footsteps rang out loudly in the stillness of the hall. It was unlighted, and we mounted the reat staircase in the gathering dusk. The crouching bears nd dragons seemed to stare at us as we went up.

Grey preceded me across the landing, and down the orridor to the panelled room. He opened the door and ntered, and I followed him in.

The room was almost dark. It was thick with shadows, which receded mysteriously as we advanced. From one of the high narrow windows a ray of light fell athwart the floor. My eyes went nervously towards the centre of the room, and rested on the tall straight-backed chair.

The shadows crept closer, but I saw the still figure seated there—motionless, in a meditative attitude, like one thinking deeply in the gloom. Grey had warned me, yet the sight startled me, and I gazed upon it almost with fear. For the dead man sat with his head drooped forward, his arm extended upon the mahogany table at his side. What was it that had caused Mockett to die thus, in the same attitude in which Simon of Hangletree was found three years before? As I looked the light flickered upon the table, and flashed upon something shining in his hand.

I started back, and turned to Colwin Grey. "Look, Grey!" I said, speaking in an unconscious whisper, as if I feared that the seated figure would overhear, "a revolver! Mockett has a revolver in his hand."

"It was Simon of Hangletree's revolver," Grey answered gravely. "But Mockett did not use it. I placed it there."

Grey had moved across the room, and my eyes followed him. He bent over the table, scrutinising the dead man's outstretched arm and hand with close intentness. There was a strange impressiveness in the act. As I watched him wonderingly he looked up at me.

"Let us sit down, Haldham," he said. "I have much to say."

"Not here, surely, Grey?" I expostulated. "Let us go downstairs—away from this grotesque and awful sight."

"What grotesque and awful sight?" he asked, in an abstracted voice. "Oh, you mean Mockett? Nonsense, Haldham! Why should you think his figure more repellent in death than in life? It is mere custom which makes us regard the last phase of our mortality so. The body of the unhappy Mockett, sunk in that chair, has more dignity and less grotesqueness than an elderly man at golf, or a

stout woman in furs and motor-goggles, with a pet dog under her arm. At least in death we do not make fools of ourselves. No! Our talk must take place in this room, for a special purpose which I wish to explain to you. And come and sit on this side of the table—I have a reason for asking that."

He lit the lamp beside him, and I went round to where he stood. Then he drew two chairs to the table, and we both sat down. The light of the lamp fell in a quivering circle upon the dark mahogany, reflecting our faces and the dead man's outstretched hand. My eyes wandered towards the still figure in the deep chair. Its mysterious aloofness seemed to challenge me, as it leaned forward a little in the gloom. The chair was beyond the light's radius, but I could see the outline of the face in shadow, the profile turned stiffly, like a man waiting and listening for someone to come in. As I gazed there came, I thought, a change—an additional tensility in that strained attitude of expectancy, as it were. I closed my eyes. Grey's voice reached me faintly, like a man speaking from a great distance away.

"Mockett has been dead nearly five hours, Haldham. Rigidity is beginning to set in. It is always quicker in cases of sudden death."

I turned towards Grey. He was again bending over the table, examining the dead man's hand. Without looking at me he said:

"We know very little of death as yet, Haldham, beyond realising that it is a natural phenomenon which puts an end to that equally strange phenomenon of life. But I have brought you here in the hope—indeed, in the expectation—that we may learn something from death tonight."

"What do you mean?" I asked breathlessly.

"I mean that I intend to try and penetrate the dreadful mystery of Simon of Hangletree's death through the body of the man who struck him down," Grey replied. "In theory I believe that I understand how it happened, but that is not the same thing as ocular demonstration and

proof. For myself I am satisfied how the monstrous thing occurred, but from the law's standpoint I have only an inferior degree of proof. The story told by Mockett leaves the deep and darker mystery unveiled. The prodigy of Simon of Hangletree's shot is so incredible and seemingly impossible, that, for Philip Arnold's sake, we must endeavour to reach demonstrative proof. I propose to try and do so through Mockett's body. Otherwise it will never be credited that such a thing could occur at all."

I stared at him in wonderment. After a brief pause he went on.

"In crime, human reason can usually unravel any human folly or wickedness, provided always that facts are material, confined to human motives and feelings, human interests and acts. But occasionally one is confronted with a problem beyond the power of reason, because something beyond the human element is there—that incalculable factor which some call chance, destiny, or fate; and others the intervention of a superior omnipotent being whom they designate God."

He paused, and his eyes sought the hand in the circle of light again. As I followed his glance it seemed to my tense imagination that the fingers resting on the small revolver slightly moved. I looked intently, but they were quite still. Grey spoke again.

"In this case I explored all avenues of human conjecture without avail. I thought from the first that Mockett fired that earlier shot, and because of it had let Philip Arnold go free. But the logical acceptance of that theory carried with it the implication that Mockett shot Mr. Simon himself, which—if Philip Arnold's confession was true—could not possibly have been the case. And from the corridor Miss Leslie saw that last scene. Apparently beyond that it was impossible to go. Yet there remained the inexplicable third shot, and Mockett's action in permitting Philip Arnold to leave Hangletree. When I listened to Miss Leslie's story I felt that Mockett's seeming compassion was dictated by some inner reason which no one knew, and that feeling was strengthened into conviction when

we came here and I saw his face. It was the set mask of a man with something to hide, though in his eyes one sometimes glimpsed strange things. But what they were I did not know. He had reached a stage when his secret had become almost too dreadful a burden for him to bear. I saw that, and spoke to him; I endeavoured to reach him, and felt that I did. Yet his confession, when it came, was of a nature hardly to be believed. It seemed only to add an element of uncanniness—of the supernatural—to this weird and ghastly case."

"An element which still remains," I said in a low voice.

Grey looked up at me thoughtfully.

"To you, perhaps, and to others, but not to me; though I have realised for some time past that the true explanation of this mystery was beyond human range. I have examined all humanly possible theories and discarded them in turn: that Simon of Hangletree fired the first shot in panic; that Mockett or some unknown visitant attacked him, missed, or wounded him; and, finally, that the shot was fatal and fired by Mockett who, concealed by the table, discharged Mr. Simon's revolver at Philip Arnold when he came in. That last theory would have been plausible if there were more than one egress from the room. But there is only one door, and the windows are high. What then remained? Something outside the nature and experience of ordinary life as we know it: some explanation based upon the supernatural, the fantastic, or the bizarre."

He paused, bent over the hand on the table for a moment, and then resumed:

"The problem remained clothed in darkness for some time, though my imagination took me some uncanny flights. For, once we stray outside the regions fixed by reason and experience, there is no limit in the domains of thought where we may not go. It was not until I had wandered long and far in this way that the first faint glimmer of the strange truth came to me, like a distant flicker of lightning in an ebon sky. At first it seemed un-

believable, but the more I pondered the more I convinced myself that, though extraordinary and without precedent, it was by no means impossible, as I had at first, and too hastily, thought. Finally, I believed; though I was helped to belief and firm conviction by a previous line of study and thought. And before Mockett made his confession last night I knew what had taken place in this room when Simon of Hangletree died three years ago. But to be morally sure was not sufficient in this case. Unfortunately for Philip Arnold, a moral belief in his innocence falls far short of legal and demonstrated proof. No one, I felt, was likely to be convinced of my theory (while it remained merely that) except myself. But with Mockett's death there came the opportunity of testing it. To-night, in this room, we are going to put it to the proof."

* * * * * *

Grey turned up the wick of the lamp slightly, and looked towards me.

"Haldham, do you remember a book you were reading on the night that Miss Leslie came to our rooms?"

I nodded with some surprise.

"Yes," I said, "quite well. It was a French work on death, written from the medical and jurisprudent point of view."

"Quite so. It is a subject which has always appealed more to the European faculty of medicine than to our own medical men; though why, it is hard to say. English medical jurisprudence has fought shy of investigating it; quite wrongly, I think. What should make more appeal to the scientific mind than the greatest mystery of all in this world of ours—the mystery of death? Death has long been a subject of scientific observation by the French forensic medicine school, and their researches have been followed with deep interest by me. That night you were reading Brouardel's work on death and sudden death, and I picked up the volume after Miss Leslie had gone. It was a remarkable coincidence; how remarkable I was far from suspecting at the time."

Again he broke off to bend over the table, and my eyes

went towards the huddled figure in the deep chair. The head was tilted a little more forward, as though its owner was bored with our company, and sought to sleep. I heard Grey's voice again.

"I remember sitting late engrossed in the writer's treatment of his subject: the pathogeny, the phenomena, and the signs of death. As a result of long study and experiment, he states conclusively that the activity of the body does not cease entirely at the instant of death. In his own words, vital phenomena are replaced by cadaveric phenomena, and he hints that the processes of decomposition sometimes produce strange effects. He also declares that, in his experience, it is an exceedingly difficult matter to determine the exact moment of death. When, exactly, does life cease? Most persons would think that point easy to settle, but the writer scouts the idea as a fallacy of lay minds. The stoppage of breathing? No; because persons who no longer breathed have been restored to life. The *cor ultimum moriens,* or stoppage of the heart? The writer, speaking from his experience, cannot admit that this is a certain sign of death. He goes further and says that the supposed proofs of death are merely probabilities; that at present we have no absolute means of judging the precise instant when death occurs."

"So Mr. Simon was not really dead, then, when Philip Arnold came to see him that night?" I broke out impetuously, under the impression that I understood the meaning of Grey's words.

He gave me a quick look.

"You are wrong," he replied. "Simon of Hangletree was dead before then. The signs of death have nothing to do with this mystery, though at one time I thought that they had. It is the other point—the replacement of vital phenomena by cadaveric phenomena—which interests us here."

I waited in silence. With another look at the table Grey continued.

"Cadaveric phenomena in the human body may assume various and diverse forms. The body does not die in every

part at once. As Brouardel says, there is the independence of the functions and the tissues. This independence has been demonstrated repeatedly in the lower animals, and has been proved to exist in the body of man. Forensic medicine also recognises the existence of motility in death. But these phases interest us merely as leading up to another thing. The phase of death which concerns us here is the moment when elasticity begins to depart from the body, and the phenomenon called rigidity, or *rigor mortis*, sets in."

The lamp on the table beside us sent up a thin tongue of flame. Grey adjusted it carefully, his eyes on the dead man's hand.

"Rigidity is indeed an infallible sign of death. It is a phenomenon curious in its nature; one which even yet is little understood. When the state is complete, the body becomes completely stiff, and can be moved about like a piece of wood. Rigidity sets in as a rule before the bodily heat has passed away, and makes its appearance, on an average, from three to six hours after death. Its duration is more irregular. In some cases it passes away in a few hours; in others it has been known to last for several days. Brouardel estimates twenty-four to forty-eight hours as the average duration of time. During the period of rigidity the muscles of the body contract to a remarkable degree. Metal discs placed in the mouth will be nearly bitten through. But it is the action of rigidity on the muscles of the body with which we have to do. See, Haldham! Look at that hand! Rigidity is now setting in. As usual, it affects the muscles of the hand first. Give me your close attention, Haldham. The moment has come."

I looked toward him. "For what?" I said.

"To solve the seemingly insoluble—to put my belief to the test. Strange, how little importance is attached by medical jurisprudence to the motility—through contraction—of the muscles in death! Even now the phenomenon of rigidity is but little understood. Yet in cases of murder it has been taken advantage of more often than is supposed; the presumption of suicide has been accepted

through the murderer putting the weapon in the hand of his victim about to close. But in this case we are faced with something more alarming by far: rigidity, in the course of muscular contraction of the victim's hand, placing the presumption of guilt upon the shoulders of an innocent man. I am aware that nothing is inconsistent in the occurrences of life, but who would have deemed death possible of perpetrating this terrible—this ghastly—thing?" Did it actually do so? That we are now going to see."

Grey spoke these words rapidly, without glancing up, but I did not glean his meaning even then. For a moment my eyes searched his face, sharply outlined in the yellow gleam of light.

"Quick, Haldham"—he spoke with a trace of unusual excitement in his calm, even tones—"come closer. Draw your chair near mine. I want you to watch."

"Watch what?" I asked.

"Mockett's hand," he replied. "You will see something before long which shall stagger your sight."

My gaze sought the table momentarily, then returned to Grey's face.

"Grey," I said hesitatingly, "I do not like this at all. What are you endeavouring to bring about? There are some things in life we were never meant to do, and I would rather not experiment with the dead."

"In the interests of the living it is necessary, Haldham," he said earnestly. "For the sake of the living—for the sake of Philip Arnold and Phyllis Leslie—you must watch. Philip Arnold is an innocent man, and we have been given the miraculous chance of proving it to-night. More I cannot explain; you must take my word for it."

My eyes returned to the table and to the hand illumined like a pink wax model in the shaft of light. As we watched, the mahogany table reflected our faces in the circle of radiance cast by the lamp. Two intent faces. . . . At that moment I feared to see a third. I had the feeling that the dead man was rising stiffly from his everlasting slumber, to glance over our shoulders and see what we were about. Slowly the moments passed, one by one. The

silence was terrible—as profound as if the three of us were dead, and that panelled room our tomb. The lamp flickered; the shadows round the table crept closer, like watching wraiths. Once more the illusion of the dead man looking over my shoulder swept over me, and I shot a fearful glance behind my chair. Grey's warning voice checked the current of my thoughts.

"Steady, Haldham," he said quietly. "Do not let your eyes wander. It cannot be long now."

I made no answer. With an effort I directed my attention to the dead man's hand on the table. Another moment passed, and again Grey broke the silence—this time in a sharp, strident voice.

"Haldham, it is coming! Watch closely—watch it intently—now!"

I did, but could see nothing. The circle of light revealed the small revolver; the hand lay relaxed and listless upon its shining length. I understood—again with an effort—that it was Mockett's hand, and I realized, wonderingly, that the revolver had once belonged to Simon of Hangletree.

"Behold!"

Who had spoken? Was it Grey? I had made no sound. My consciousness was fixed upon those objects in the light, which held me spell-bound, to the exclusion of all other things. A conviction swept me in a wave of terror. Had I seen those listless fingers move? I sat and gazed, hoping—and, yes—praying, that my eyes had played me false. Then it came—the frightful and appalling thing. There was a slight quiver—a tightening—a gradual muscular contraction of the hand. The lifeless fingers moved and contracted—the one resting on the trigger seemed to bend. The next instant I had sprung up and leaped back from the table, my arms outstretched, my sanity tottering, as the sharp report of the weapon on the table rang through the room.

"Oh, God!" I cried; "this is too horrible—too impossible—for human belief. What can it mean—what is the explanation? Can it be that the dead return to life?"

I spun round, and gazed at the deep leather chair. The figure within it sat bent stiffly forward, like a man sunk in dreamless slumber. Mockett was dead; yet his hand had fired that shot, as though he had been restored to life. As I looked, there came to me the thought that Mockett was not of this world or the next, but a creature of some dreadful limbo; dead, yet still alive. My spirit sickened as I looked at the seated figure. I turned hurriedly to Grey.

"I cannot bear this," I said hoarsely. "For God's sake, Grey, tell me what has taken place."

"Come, let us go downstairs," was all Grey said. And we went from the room. With the lamp held high to guide us, my companion led the way to the library again.

* * * * * *

"The explanation is complete," said Grey. "Mockett has solved the problem of Simon of Hangletree's death. The phenomenon known as *rigor mortis* usually affects the hand first. It was so in this case. As the hand stiffened in the process of rigidity the muscular fibres of the fingers contracted in the usual way. The finger resting on the trigger tightened, pressed it, and the weapon went off. That was exactly what happened when Philip Arnold went upstairs to see his father that evening three years ago."

"Can this be possible?" I asked.

"Have you not just witnessed it?" was Grey's response.

I had, but even yet I doubted the evidence of my eyes. Grey sat silent for a moment or two, lost in thought.

"It was different before. There was no premeditation—no pre-arrangement—of the act. Mocket placed the weapon in Simon of Hangletree's fingers to suggest suicide, though he was not actually conscious of the intention, he said. The weapon was found in the stiffened clasp of the hand—held so tightly that it was with difficulty withdrawn. Simon of Hangletree died in a characteristic attitude: seated in his big chair, head drooped forward, yet glancing, as it were, towards the door. His outstretched arm was on the table beside him, the revolver in his stiffening fingers pointing toward the figure of his son. The tightening pressure of the finger just as Philip Arnold entered

was a dreadful coincidence—a glib and ghastly lie of circumstances—a grim stroke of fate. Can you wonder that it carried sinister conviction? Can you wonder that these two unhappy young people were completely deceived? Think of it; think of that strange scene! Phyllis Leslie, looking on unseen from the corridor saw the gleam of her uncle's revolver in the twilight, feared for Arnold, and uttered a warning cry. In a panic, Philip Arnold drew his own weapon. There were two shots, but Simon of Hangletree fired first. But who could tell—who could guess—and, least of all, that unhappy boy and girl—that the first shot came from the lifeless fingers of a hand already dead? Even you, who know all, are inclined to doubt it still."

"I cannot help it," I rejoined. "It seems too strange, too terrible to be true. It is almost unbelievable that Philip Arnold should have confessed to the murder of his father, under the impression that he had shot one who was already dead. I am confounded and bewildered at the bare idea."

"Human life on this planet rests upon experience," answered Grey; "once something has happened, it is no longer too strange to be true. This has happened; therefore it becomes possible at once. When I began to draw near the truth I had something of your feeling—at first. But for years I have been engaged at different periods in the study of the mystery called death, so I approached my discovery—or, more accurately, my theory—from the medical and scientific point of view. Looking on it from that side I saw its possibility, however remote, but that was not enough. I wanted the opportunity to make a second and conclusive experiment—not to convince myself, for I already believed—but to convince the law, for the sake of those who had suffered, and are still suffering, from this most cruel and inhuman stroke of fate. That seemed impossible; yet the opportunity came—and through the death of the man who has been responsible for it all. *That* is the strangest part of it, Haldham; explain it as you like. It was as though the obscure element

in our complicated existence, which some call destiny, had relented at last."

"Mockett was a coward, but he showed courage in facing that scene upstairs," I said. "It is a wonder that his face did not betray him—enough, at least, to put Philip Arnold on his guard."

"Against what?" asked Grey. "He entered the panelled room at dusk, and saw the dim outline of his father's figure seated by a table, a revolver in his hand. Philip, his mind in a turmoil, and burning with the memory of his mother's sufferings, spoke to the figure in the chair. To his reproaches his father said nothing, but quite unexpectedly fired a shot. Then Philip—a boy of reckless and impulsive temperament—almost unconsciously fired a shot in return. A moment or two later Mockett entered the room. His face might have betrayed something to an unconcerned observer, but not to Philip, who was in a greater state of agitation than himself. And Mockett, you must remember, to some extent divined what had taken place. He knew that he had left a loaded revolver in Simon of Hangletree's hand. and he guessed that in some manner it had been discharged. He showed courage and resource in turning the event to his own account, though not, I think, in an exceptional degree. When self-preservation is the issue, the brain works at lightning speed. On the other hand, how could Philip Arnold have conceived, in his wildest conjecture, that his father was dead? He saw him sitting in his room, spoke to him, and was staggered by an unexpected shot. Even Phyllis Leslie, watching from outside, had not the faintest perception of the truth. If Philip Arnold had entered a little earlier or later he would have been saved. If earlier, he would have had time to discover that his father was dead; if later, the shot would have been fired. He was the victim of an incredible and unprecedented coincidence. A ghastly coincidence, indeed! Can you wonder at a judge and jury condemning him for what he himself believed—that he had shot his father. How could he or they have guessed that he had shot a man who was already dead?"

He was silent for a thoughtful moment, then went on.

"There was another circumstance which helped Mockett in a remarkable way. In sudden death the body usually falls to the ground, though not invariably so. But if the spinal cord is injured in the neck or a little below it, the body may—and sometimes does—remain in the posture it was at the moment of death. Instances of this have been photographed on the field of battle; it happened in Simon of Hangletree's death. Philip Arnold gazed upon a life-like figure before he fired that unlucky shot; a seated figure with head bent forward and right arm extended rigidly, though complete rigidity had not then set in."

"But Mockett did not die from a bullet wound," I remarked.

"No; but in his case I placed the body in a similar position before muscular contraction began," Grey replied. "It was an easy matter while bodily warmth remained, though quite impossible once rigidity had set in. Then the body stiffens completely—legs straight, the arms flexed across the breast, hands clenched; the so-called 'attitude of combat'—of death. Now you know everything, Haldham, so let us put these gruesome facts out of mind. It has been a trying experience for you, but the dark problem is solved at last. Our next duty is to convince others, and to set Philip Arnold free. But Phyllis Leslie had better hear the news first of all."

"She will be overjoyed when you tell her," I said, "and her life will be happy again now."

Grey nodded slowly and doubtfully.

"I hope so," he said.

GEORGE BARTON

THE MYSTERY OF THE GOLD SEAL

It was Sergeant Cuff in Wilkie Collins' story of the "Moonstone" who declared that in all of this crime-ridden world there was no such thing as a trifle.

In considering the case which we are now about to relate, the reader will no doubt come to the same conclusion; because it was what appeared to be an insignificant detail that made certain the solution of a most perplexing mystery.

On the ninth of August, 1898, a small package arrived at the Dover, Delaware, postoffice. It was addressed to Mrs. John P. Dunning, daughter of former Congressman Pennington of that place. It was duly delivered and found to be a beautifully decorated candy box, containing chocolate creams, a handkerchief and a small slip of paper on which was written: "With love to yourself and the baby.—Mrs. C."

Mrs. Dunning at once assumed that it had come from one of her friends who was familiar with the fact that there was a baby in the house, although she was at a loss to place the sender; and could not connect the initial "C" with anyone she knew. However, she did not give this phase of the matter much thought, but opened the box of chocolates and distributed them to the members of the family who were at home. She indulged quite freely as did her sister, Mrs. Joshua Deane.

A few hours later everyone who had eaten the candy was taken violently ill. Physicians were summoned, and found the members of the family in great agony, accom-

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panied by fits of vomiting. The doctors remained all night and managed to save most of the victims.

But Mrs. Dunning and Mrs. Deane died as a result of the poisoning.

There were autopsies, and they proved that the two women had died from arsenic poisoning. The matter was immediately placed in the hands of the police, and then began the assembling of the chain of circumstances which were to make the Dunning case famous from Maine to California, and even in Europe.

The first important discovery was the fact that the handwriting on the box and the slip of paper corresponded with that of an anonymous letter that had been sent from California to Mrs. Dunning some months before. There had been much speculation concerning this communication at the time, because Mrs. Dunning could not imagine that she had an enemy in that part of the world. In the meantime, Mr. Dunning, who was a war correspondent and away from home most of the time, had received word of the double tragedy in his household, and had hastened to Dover at once. He at once identified the handwriting as that of Mrs. Cordelia Botkin, a woman with whom he had become acquainted while he was stationed in San Francisco.

This was a most important starting point; and as a result of the information the police came into possession of other important facts. Mr. Dunning, for instance, recalled that on one occasion, while talking with Mrs. Botkin, he had told her that his wife was passionately fond of candy. It was also remembered that Mrs. Dunning had a friend in San Francisco named "Corbaley." The husband thought he might have mentioned this in his talk with Mrs. Botkin. Thus two points in the tragedy were cleared up. The sender of the candy was almost certain that Mrs. Dunning would be thoughtless enough to eat it when it reached her, and the initial "C" signed to the note would make her imagine that it had come from her friend in the West.

We have seen that she did not think of Mrs. Corbaley

in this connection, but she did eat the candy, as anticipated.

Chief of Police Lees, who took charge of the case, went to San Francisco at once, carrying with him the handkerchief, the candy box and the note found in the box. He was fortunate enough to find Mrs. Botkin at once. She was living at Stockton. He called on her and had an extended interview. The answers to his questions were far from satisfactory, and Chief Lees decided to make a bold stroke at the outset. He arrested Mrs. Botkin, brought her to San Francisco, and placed her in jail there pending a further investigation.

This was proceeding on the French system by which persons who are suspected of crime are compelled to prove their innocence.

But having made the arrest, it became his duty to offer ample justification for having done so. He began by trying to learn all that was possible of the life and habits of the accused woman. He discovered that she had lived in San Francisco for some time, and that upon the date when the box of candy was mailed to Delaware, had rooms at the Hotel Victoria. A short time after that, she quit the hotel for the apartments which she had rented in Stockton. The detective was filled with a desire to see the rooms she had occupied while in the hotel. He made a most minute examination of the place; and, like Poe's celebrated detective, was not satisfied until he had made a personal inspection of every chair and bit of furniture in the apartment.

He cross-questioned the servants, and when he spoke of the box of candy, it was one of the maids who called attention to a detail of prime importance. She said that when she cleared up the rooms, she had found among other things on the floor, the fancy paper that is usually used for wrapping candy boxes. On this paper was a gold seal which was a sort of trade-mark for the candy. Seemingly insignificant, it was one of the small things that was to play a big part in the solution of the mystery. Detective Lees took possession of this gold seal and treasured it as

though it were a real gold instead of a paper imitation of the actual thing.

After that the police made a tour of the candy stores of San Francisco in the attempt to discover where this particular box of candy had been purchased. It was a seemingly endless quest, but the gold seal helped very much, and on the morning of the third day they found the shop where the candy had been bought. The saleswoman who had waited on the purchaser was also located. She said she had had many customers on the morning of July 31, 1898, but that she remembered one in particular because of two little details. One was the request that the candy be placed in a box which did not contain the name of the firm, or indeed, any name. This seemed to be an odd desire, as the firm was noted for its fine candy and most persons rather liked to have the distinction of buying their confectionery from a firm with a high reputation. The second detail noted by the saleswoman was still more significant. The customer directed that the box be not entirely filled as she had another article to place in it. The theory was that she had left that space for the poisoned candy which had done its deadly work as well.

The next thing was to ascertain the identity of the woman who had purchased the candy. The saleswoman was taken to the county prison and permitted to see Mrs. Botkin, who was still in custody. Without the slightest hesitation she declared that the prisoner was the woman who had purchased the candy, and who had directed her to place it in a box that did not contain any means of identification.

The handwriting expert of the San Francisco police was called into the case and given letters that had been written by Mrs. Botkin. Mr. Dunning, the husband of the deceased, furnished them with copies of letters he had received at different times from the prisoner. This part of the inquiry was conducted with great care, and at its conclusion, the expert declared that he was perfectly satisfied that the person who had written the letters had

also written the address on the candy box, and was the author of the little slip of paper containing the note addressed to Mrs. Dunning.

The odds were now all against Mrs. Botkin, but when she was asked to make a clean breast of the whole business, she positively denied her guilt; and said she had not mailed the candy and had no knowledge of who had sent it. Again and again the authorities tried to induce her to make a confession, but each time her denials were more vehement. She was under a terrible nervous strain. She had competent counsel, and the lawyers strongly fought the attempt to extradite her from California to Delaware, taking the ground that the case should be tried in San Francisco where she lived.

In the meantime the police continued at work in the hope of obtaining still more evidence. They ascertained the names of other women who were acquainted with Mrs. Botkin. They found one woman at Stockton who admitted that the prisoner had talked with her strangely on two occasions. One night she discussed poisons and wanted to know just how effective different poisons were in destroying human life, and how they would work if administered under certain conditions. It was a creepy kind of conversation and the friend of Mrs. Botkin says that she tried to change it, but that the accused stuck to the topic with amazing persistence. The witness forgot it the next day, but it came to mind vividly after Mrs. Botkin had been arrested on the charge of killing Mrs. Dunning.

The same woman said that Mrs. Botkin had questioned her closely concerning the postal regulations, and wanted to know if a package could be registered if the sender did not appear in person at the post office. She was particularly anxious to know if it was necessary to sign one's name in sending a registered package through the mails. The postal clerk who accepted the package identified Mrs. Botkin. The authorities now felt that they were in possession of sufficient evidence to convict Mrs. Botkin. Only one point remained to be proven, and that concerned the

purchase of the poison. Aside from that the police had now proven:

1. That Mrs. Botkin had purchased the candy in San Francisco.

2. That she asked the saleswoman to put it in a plain box.

3. That she asked her to leave space for another package.

4. That Mrs. Botkin had written the note which accompanied the box.

5. That the gold seal found in her hotel room had been torn from the paper covering of that box of candy.

6. That she had consulted a friend concerning the effect of various poisons.

7. That Mrs. Botkin had actually mailed the box of poisoned candy.

The police made the rounds of all the drug stores in San Francisco in the endeavor to ascertain which of them had sold poison on the day the box of candy was mailed. Naturally many of them had, but they were eliminated one by one, until the query was brought down to a drug store only a short distance from the hotel where Mrs. Botkin had lived at the time. The clerk happened to have a retentive memory. He recalled a woman customer who had come to him in some agitation for the purpose of obtaining arsenic for cleaning a straw hat. The reader will note here that in almost every instance, Mrs. Botkin left her trail behind her. She was trying hard to cover her tracks and yet she always managed to do or say something that impressed her personality upon the clerk or saleswoman with whom she was doing business. In other words, it is evident she must have been what is popularly known as "a fussy woman." But hear the evidence of the drug clerk:

"A woman came to me on the day in question, and said that she wanted to get something that would clean an old straw hat that was very much faded. Before I could make any suggestion, she said she would like to have two ounces of arsenic. I told her that we had a preparation

for that purpose that was really just as good as arsenic, and less costly and dangerous. She laughed hysterically at this suggestion, and said she had been warned not to permit drug clerks to fool her by inducing her to buy something that was 'just as good.' I assured her that it meant nothing to me; but she became angry then, and said that she knew just what she wanted and that if I did not give it to her, she would go elsewhere. Thereupon, I supplied her with the two ounces of arsenic. It seemed to me at the time that she was very much excited over the cleaning of an old hat. But I really did not suspect that she wanted it for any improper purpose. All of the regulations were complied with, and after the sale, I forgot all about it until I read of this case in the newspapers."

"Would you remember the woman who bought this arsenic if you were to see her again?" asked the detective who was interviewing the clerk.

He hesitated a moment.

"Yes," he said finally, "I think I would."

On the strength of this, the police determined to arrange a final test; and if it were successful, to base their case on the evidence they had in hand.

Mrs. Botkin was brought to the sitting room of the prison, and at the same time the police arranged to have several other women there. The matron of the place assisted in staging the drama. When it was completed, there were probably half a dozen women in the room. Then the clerk from the drug store was brought into the room. He did not know why he had been sent for, but as soon as he arrived the detective said:

"Please look carefully at all of the women in this room and then point out the one who bought the arsenic from you."

It was a dramatic moment. He paused and then made the rounds, staring at one after the other. Most of them were nervous under this scrutiny. Mrs. Botkin alone seemed calm. After he had finished, and without any hesitation, the clerk pointed his finger—it seemed like the finger of fate—directly at her:

"That is the woman who bought the arsenic!"

It was as though he were the Judge announcing her doom. She must have thought so too, because from that moment, she lost all hope.

The trial was contested; but as the evidence was slowly unrolled no one in the court-room had any doubt about the result. The jury did not stay out very long. When they filed in, the foreman said solemnly:

"Guilty of murder in the first degree."

Under the indictment, Mrs. Botkin was sentenced to life imprisonment, that being considered more humane than hanging by the neck until dead. The usual attempts were made to have her pardoned, but they all came to naught. It was not long after she was sentenced that Mrs. Botkin became a physical wreck. In 1909 she suffered a complete collapse, and eventually died from softening of the brain. Perhaps this fact explains some of the puzzling features of this case. To the ordinary layman it would seem that Mrs. Botkin had done everything that was possible to direct attention to what she was accused of doing. Her friends seized upon this as proof that she was not guilty. On the other hand, it might be claimed that one who would deliberately plan poisoning could not reason logically. Hence the chain of circumstantial evidence that confronted her at her trial. We have here food for thought in favor of the claim that all criminals are mentally defective.

GEORGE BARTON

THE GREEN POCKETBOOK

DESIRE BODASSE was a tapestry weaver who had his home and his shop in the Rue Princess in Paris many years ago. He was an unusual man in many respects. His skin was dark and withered like a russet apple that had been exposed to the wind and the weather, and he had a pair of shrewd gray eyes that seemed to penetrate into the secret thoughts of others. Everybody knew him, and everybody liked him—apparently—although he had the reputation of being close in money matters, and had been accused of being a miser.

But one day he disappeared as completely as if the earth of Paris had opened and swallowed him in its depths.

The fact that he lived alone made it difficult to trace his movements, but some of the neighbors said that he had not shown himself for two or three days. This was such a strange thing for the sociable Bodasse that they immediately came to the conclusion that he was a victim of foul play. There was an exhaustive search, but no signs of the man. On the table in the little dining room was the daily newspaper and pipe and specs which he was in the habit of reading with religious regularity; but an examination showed that it was three days old. That would indicate that it had been three days since he was in the house. On the bureau in his bedroom, was the old pipe which he had smoked every night for as many years as his oldest friends could remember. But the ashes were cold in the discolored bowl. He was essentially a man of

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methodical habits, and now he puzzled everyone by this most irregular disappearance.

What had become of Desire Bodasse? Had he been kidnapped? Had he wandered away from his home while suffering from delusions or mental aberrations? Could he have committed suicide? Was it a case of murder? None of these questions could be answered satisfactorily, and the distant relatives of the dead man—he had no near relatives—were about to give up the puzzle when someone suggested that Monsieur Mace of the French Secret Police be invited to investigate the case.

It was a happy thought, and the moment he entered two things were certain: First, he would get the facts, if it were humanly possible; and Second, that it must be an extraordinarily difficult case, because that was the only kind he deigned to notice. Monsieur Mace was the possessor of a broad, expressionless face; and he had the happy faculty of getting at the heart of a mystery. He never seemed to exert himself, but that restless mind of his was never at rest. He was always thinking, even when he appeared to be in repose, and when the word went forth that he had been engaged to unravel the mystery of the disappearance of Desire Bodasse, a friend of the man said to his niece:

"You may be at peace now; the mystery is as good as solved."

The famous man called and made a careful inspection of the premises on the Rue Princess, and after that he called upon one of the female relatives of Bodasse. He went to the heart of the matter in the first question.

"Your uncle was a very careful man—a very methodical man. Did he never say anything to you about what should be done in the case of his death?"

"Why, yes," she exclaimed with brightening eyes, "now that you mention it, I recall his saying that if anything should ever happen to him, we would find his check books, his bonds and his green pocketbook in the top drawer of the bureau in his bedroom."

Without further ado, the detective hastened to the house

of Desire Bodasse, accompanied by his niece, and the two of them made a careful search of the bureau which had been mentioned. In order that there should be no mistake they made a search of the entire room. But they had their labor for their pains.

The green pocketbook—and all of the other possessions of the aged tapestry maker—had disappeared as mysteriously as the man himself.

That fact might have gone to explain the entire business. Who could say but that Bodasse had determined to shake the dust of Paris from his feet and with his money, seek rest and amusement elsewhere? But when this was suggested to Mace, he shook his big head vigorously:

"No, no! That would not be in character with this man. He was—if I must use the word—a miser. He would not spend his money in such a way. We must look elsewhere for the solution of this puzzle. The man must have had some friends. Who were his friends? When we locate them, we may get upon the trail of the mystery."

In the course of a few days, Mace learned that the missing man lived very much alone; but there were three cronies who were in the habit of calling upon him at intervals. One was Pierre Sinquise, an elderly man who lived upon a small income, and had an abundance of leisure; another was George La France; and the third was Henri Voirbo. Now the detective had a curious philosophy of his own. He believed that either money or women were at the root of all crime, and he proceeded upon this theory. Calm consideration convinced him that there was no woman in this case. That being the case, it must be money. After that he mentally placed the three friends of Bodasse under suspicion. Sinquise was dismissed by the process of elimination. Having money of his own, he would not be tempted by that belonging to the old tapestry maker. That left La France and Voirbo. Both were impecunious and both were noted for their habit of borrowing money from their friends.

At this point the detective made a discovery which

caused his heart to beat a little faster. He found that a week before the disappearance of the old recluse, Voirbo had called upon him and asked him for a loan of one hundred francs. Bodasse had bluntly refused to make the loan, saying that he worked hard for all the money he possessed, and that it would be a good thing if Voirbo would do the same. A quarrel ensued; high words passed between the two, and it ended in the breaking of a long friendship.

The next thing was to locate Voirbo. That was not so easy, but it was finally accomplished. The detective talked with the landlady of the suspected one, and the things she told the officer did not tend to raise the man in the estimation of the officer of the law. Voirbo lived from hand to mouth. At times he was penniless and at other times he was very "flush" with money. This in itself did not convict him of foul play with regard to his former friend, but it furnished a motive; and as Mace was wont to say, "Without a motive, one is like a Captain who tries to sail his ship without a chart." The detective asked the landlady if Voirbo had recently been punctual in the payment of his rent. He had. Did he pay last month's dues in cash? He did not. He gave a check which the good landlady had cashed at a small banker's nearby. The detective went there at once and found that the check corresponded precisely with one of those that had been stolen from the bureau drawer of Monsieur Bodasse.

He discovered also that on or about the day that the tapestry worker had disappeared, Voirbo had gone to his friend's apartment in a very agitated state of mind. He said he was not to be disturbed under any consideration; and when the charwoman came to scrub the floor as usual, she found that Voirbo had already performed that task. He gave as a reason that he had accidentally dropped a bottle containing a disagreeable fluid and wished to clean it up as soon as possible. M. Mace was now satisfied that Bodasse had been murdered, and that he had the murderer, but before taking final action he wished to see Voirbo and put him to the test. He succeeded in locating

the suspect, and told him he was trying to get a clue to the murder of Desire Bodasse.

"Has that poor old man been murdered?" exclaimed Voirbo. "If that be true, you have given me information for which I have been vainly searching these many weeks. He was my friend, and I have been distracted over his disappearance. To tell the truth, I have been trying to do some detective work on my own account."

"What do you mean? Trying to do detective work? In what way? Please explain yourself."

"There is not much to explain," said the man, patiently enough. "Long ago I did some police work, and I imagined that I would penetrate this matter without the aid of the authorities. I now see my error. While I am saddened to hear that my friend is dead, I am rejoiced to know that you are working on the case. If there is any way in which I can help you, I am yours to command."

Surely nothing could be more straightforward than this offer. For a moment, it made Mace feel that he had been doing Voirbo an injustice. But he concealed his feelings and in that moment resolved to carry out a bold experiment which he had been nursing for some days. He accepted the offer of assistance and invited Voirbo to meet him at the rooms of Desire Bodasse that afternoon.

"I will do so with pleasure," said the suspect, "and I can assure you that no one will rejoice more than myself if you find the man who has done this great wrong."

The detective made it his business to be at the rooms of the missing man ahead of the suspect. He arranged all of the furniture and the fixings of the rooms so as to reconstruct the apartments as they had been on the last day Bodasse was seen there. In the middle of the room was a large round table. It seemed commonplace enough, but around it was to be played a tragedy from the modern life of Paris. When everything was ready, Voirbo was called into the room. He entered with a smile upon his face and perfectly self-possessed. He nodded to M. Mace and the other officers who were present:

"Well, gentlemen," he said. "What have you discovered?"

"Nothing," replied the detective. "But we are going to make a little experiment and we want to have your assistance."

Voirbo displayed perturbation for the first time at these words, but he managed to smile and to say that he was at the service of M. Mace.

Now M. Mace had noticed one peculiarity of the apartment. It had a tiled floor which sloped down from the window to the bed in the recess of the room. The detective had the round table removed from its place in the center of the apartment. After making some other changes in the furniture, he picked up a pitcher of water and turning to Voirbo said:

"I am satisfied that the work of dismembering the body took place in this room. Now you will notice that this tiled floor has a decided slope. Any other fluid will act in the same manner. Now I am about to empty this pitcher of water upon the floor, and we will watch and see what happens."

He did so; and the water flowed straight toward the bed and collected under it in two small pools. These spots were sponged dry, and then a mason was sent to take up the tiles. It was some time before the man arrived, and in the meanwhile Voirbo had made some excuse for wanting to leave the room; but M. Mace would not permit him to leave.

"You are the intimate friend of the deceased," he said softly, "and it is my wish that you remain to see the result of our little experiment."

When the mason arrived, he performed his work with neatness and dispatch. A quantity of dried blood was found under the tiles, and between them. The test had succeeded. The detective turned to Voirbo, and said to him in stern, accusing tones:

"Now, Monsieur, I arrest you for the murder of Desire Bodasse!"

Voirbo tried to speak, but his lips refused to frame the words. He gulped hard for a few moments, and then he moistened his lips with the tip of the tongue:

"This is infamous," he cried shrilly, "and you are treating me shamefully. You know—you know—that I—that I—did not kill——"

"I know that you are a murderer," exclaimed Mace in a loud voice, "and I know that you are mean and contemptible because you killed this old man for his money. And in the face of that, you have the hardihood to stand up and say you were his friend. How dare you profane such a sacred word in such a manner? How dare you——"

Voirbo was staggering toward the detective by this time. His face was ashen, and his hands were trembling.

"Stop!" he cried, "for God's sake stop torturing me. I'll tell you the truth. I killed him, and I am ready to surrender."

"How did you do it?" asked Mace in an altered and subdued voice.

"It was an impulse—an impulse which I cannot explain. I was mad. I must have been mad—money mad! After he refused me the small loan, I went home and nursed my grievance. Two days later I returned and told him I must have the money. Again he refused, and in my rage, I struck him. When he fell on the floor, I first conceived the idea of killing him for his money. I—I did it——"

At the recollection of the scene, Voirbo put his hands over his eyes and wept. In a few moments he recovered.

"After the murder," he continued, "I dismembered the body in this room. The limbs and the trunk I hid in an old well near here. The body I dropped into the Seine. I thought no one could ever learn the truth. But I never imagined that your devilish imagination would cause you to look for the dried blood under the tiles. It is unbelievable! You are more than human!"

After the murderer had been placed under lock and key, one of the associates of M. Mace said to him:

"Voirbo was right; your work was truly wonderful. But how did you get the first clue?"

The detective gave a reminiscent smile.

"It was easy. I found the green pocketbook belonging

to Bodasse in the room of Voirbo. That satisfied me that the old recluse had been murdered for his money, and that Voirbo was the murderer. The only thing left was to visualize the business. How had he done it, and how could it be traced? A mixture of imagination and common sense did the rest. But do not let us dwell upon the unpleasant business. The law will do the rest."

But the great detective was mistaken. The law did not perform its part. Voirbo was found in his cell hanging to the rafters.

GEORGE BARTON

THE TOY LANTERN

HORACE SMITH, an amiable, educated, law-abiding Englishman, who lived at Muswell Hill in a large house adjoining the Highgate Woods, near London, was found murdered in the early part of May, 1896.

Sergeant-Inspector Gregory, one of the veteran operatives of Scotland Yard, was sent out on the case. He was a man on the order of Sherlock Holmes, but with this difference—he was an actual person who had to contend with the actual incidents of every-day life and with no Doctor Watson to assist him. Inspector Gregory found footprints in the garden and blood on the flowers which were trampled in the dust. Also he discovered a jimmy and a toy lantern—the property, perhaps, of some child.

He worked for two weeks without results. But he was a lover of flowers himself, and he had a keen desire to know how this harmless old flower lover had met with his death. Also he was known about Scotland Yard as Stick-at-it-Gregory.

At the end of a month he concentrated all of his thoughts on that toy lantern. He made up his mind to discover what there was about it that would distinguish it from any other lantern. He took it apart and he brooded over it. Finally he found the clue in the wick of the toy lantern. It was not in the mere fact that it was a wick but rather in the quality of the wick. It was evidently of home manufacture and had been made from a piece of tartan stuff such as is usually used in the dresses of girls and young women. By putting the cloth wick under

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the microscope it was found that it was a Scotch plaid fabric. It was, or had been, scarlet, banded with dark green, and striped with lines of yellow and black. All of these details did not come out at once but developed by degrees as the investigation proceeded.

Gregory was delighted. He had something tangible to work on. It was only a matter of patient plodding to get into communication with manufacturers of Scotch plaids and with the houses which sold these things to dressmakers and small dealers. This was not done in a day or a week, but eventually it led him to a house in the poor section of London, occupied by Mrs. Emma Millsom. The daughter of Mrs. Millsom was wearing a frock of the same material out of which the wick in the toy lantern was made!

It was a most important and astounding discovery. The woman admitted that she had some of the material in the house and that part of it had been used to make the wick for the lantern. It soon became evident that Mrs. Millsom was personally innocent of any wrong doing, but it developed presently that she had a brother-in-law, Jack Millsom, and he had a pal named Bill Fowler and that both were known to the police. They had lived at her house for a time and had gone out and taken the toy lantern with them on the night that poor Horace Smith was so cruelly murdered at Muswell Hill.

Here was circumstantial evidence of a convincing character. The next thing was to apprehend the men. They were not at home; they were not even in London. Mrs. Millsom tearfully protested that she had no knowledge of their whereabouts. She did all that she could to protect her brother-in-law and said that while he was wayward he must not be regarded as a professional crook.

"But he has no business," protested the detective. "He has no respectable method of earning a living."

"Indeed he has, sir."

"What is he?"

"He is an artist," she replied, not without a sense of pride.

The detective felt puzzled—and looked it, too.

"Do you mean a painter?"

"Oh, dear, no. He's a performer; he travels with the circus sometimes."

The detective heard these words with intense satisfaction. It put him on a fresh trail. He visited the various theatrical and amusement booking offices of London and soon he had located both Millsom and Fowler. They had both booked with "Foster's Big Show" which was then doing the provinces with the "greatest and grandest ag gregation of wonders ever gathered under a single canvas." Millsom had signed for general utility purposes and Fowler was to be the strong man of the circus. It now became comparatively easy to find the two men. By consulting the "dates" published in the theatrical newspapers it was learned that the Foster Show with its "greatest and grandest aggregation of wonders ever gathered under a single canvas" was to show at Bath the following afternoon and evening.

Gregory reported these facts to his chief, and Mr. Macnaughton—who is now Sir Melville L. Macnaughton —instructed him to go ahead and follow the case to its natural conclusion. Accordingly he started for Bath early the next morning accompanied by a trusted assistant. They reached what has justly been called the handsomest city in England shortly before noon. The detective had obtained possession of photographs of Millsom and Fowler and in the hundred-mile ride from London he mapped out his line of procedure. He determined to get a sight of his men first. It might cause a panic if he attempted to arrest them in the circus and there was a possibility that, in the excitement, they might escape. An audience often makes an idol of a performer and if the detective tried "any rough stuff" he might get the worst of it. Hence he decided to follow the men to their lodgings and make the arrest there.

All of these things had been planned when Gregory and his companion reached the ancient city. They found placards everywhere announcing the performances of the marvelous show. Millsom's name was not as conspicuous

as some of the others, showing that he was a subordinate member of the company.

The performance had already started when they reached the tent but the obliging ticket agent furnished them with pasteboards with the cheerful remark that there was "always room for two more." If he had suspected that these two contemplated robbing him of one of his attractions he might not have been so cheerful. The usual acts followed: the educated dogs, the daring horseback riders and the trained monkeys. The "strong man" was about half way down the program, sandwiched in between a quartette of bell ringers and a pole balancer. The moment he appeared in the ring Gregory knew that he was the person he wanted. He tallied with the photograph of Fowler. He performed some really wonderful feats of strength and as the Scotland Yard man gazed on his enormous arms and his abnormally developed muscles he was not surprised that poor old Horace Smith had died without a struggle.

The "brute," as Gregory called Fowler, looked mighty good in his tights and spangles, but the detective mentally pictured the scene that had taken place at Muswell Hill, and he shivered even while the audience was greeting the act with wild applause. Having identified Fowler it required only a few minutes to establish the whereabouts of Millsom. He had charge of the animals and acted the part of a general utility man.

The question now was how to take the men into custody. The large shows carry cots and the men sleep under the tents, but Foster's "wonderful aggregation" was in reality a third-rate affair. It had evidently been organized for a short tour in the hope of catching any money that might have been overlooked by the first-class shows. After the performance the detective discovered that his men were making their temporary quarters at a cheap hostelry known as the Black Bear Inn. He called on the local police and informed them of his mission at Bath. The chief was flattered at being given the confidence of Scotland Yard on such a big case and he cheerfully consented to assign

several of his officers to assist in the capture of the Muswell Hill murderers.

It was determined to go for them just after they had finished their suppers and before they started to return to the circus. It was probably seven o'clock when Gregory called at the office of the Black Bear Inn and asked to see Fowler.

"He's in his room," said the obliging clerk. "Would you like to send your card up?"

The detective smiled.

"No," he answered, "I won't bother about that formality. A few of his friends here would like to surprise him and if you don't mind we'll go right upstairs."

And so they did, walking up the narrow stairway in Indian file. Gregory led the way, followed by his assistant and four of the officers from the Bath police headquarters. The old man had his pistol in his hip pocket and he kept his hand on it in case of emergency. At the head of the stairs he collided with a person who proved to be Millsom.

"Where the devil are you going, you stupid blockhead?" growled the criminal to the detective.

"I beg your pardon," was the suave reply, "but it was an accident."

"Accident be blowed," snarled the other, "you watch where you're going."

"What's that on your hands?" cried Gregory, suddenly.

Unthinkingly Millsom put out his two hands and gazed at them stupidly.

"I don't see nothing," he began. "I'm——"

But before he could finish the sentence the detective had pulled a pair of glistening handcuffs from his pocket and slipped them over the extended wrists. At the same moment one of the local officers leveled a pistol at the fellow's head.

"If you attempt to make the slightest outcry," he hissed, "you're a dead man!"

The suddenness of the attack took Millsom's breath away. When the meaning of the business dawned on him he realized his predicament. He had few scruples, but he

did have respect for the business end of a revolver. He was a prisoner anyhow and any struggle on his part would be in vain. Besides the most he could accomplish would be to alarm Fowler and why should he run any risk for the sake of that burly scoundrel? Misery loves company, too, and Millsom got a few moments' joy out of the reflection that his pal would soon be in the same fix he was in.

"I'll be quiet," he murmured, in a whisper. "Take that gun away from my nose."

He was turned over to two policemen, quietly conveyed down stairs, and taken to the local jail to await further developments. In the meantime Gregory and his assistants had not left the stairway. Their task was greatly simplified. They now had one man to deal with. But in spite of that they proceeded with the greatest caution.

The old man hesitated about rushing into the room. He had a desperate man to deal with and one who was apt to be armed. Even though taken by surprise he might succeed in sending some of the officers to the happy hunting grounds. So he resolved to begin operations with strategy instead of force. He tapped on the door of Fowler's room.

"Come in," called a surly voice.

Gregory turned the knob and walked into the room. It was an ordinary sized apartment with one window. A man of herculean build stood over near the mantelpiece, smoking a clay pipe. He scowled savagely at the intruder.

"Well, what do you want?"

"Mr. Fowler, if I'm not mistaken?" purred the detective.

"That's my name. What do you want with me."

Without any preliminary Gregory blurted out:

"I want you for the murder of Horace Smith!"

Fowler gave a convulsive start; his fingers trembled and the clay pipe slipped from them and crashed into a dozen pieces on the bricked fireplace. He looked about him and saw the window and the open door. With a snarl he made a dash for the Scotland Yard man. But Gregory stepped aside and the giant made a break through the open

door—only to run into the arms of the waiting policemen.

There was a dramatic scene in the court room when the two murderers were brought to trial. Fowler thought Millsom had betrayed him.

"You'll squeal, will you, you traitor! I'll give you something to remember!"

He made a dash at the throat of his pal, but court officers interfered and another tragedy was averted. The formal trial of Millsom and Fowler resulted in the speedy conviction of both men. The evidence against them was conclusive and overwhelming. But the bit of evidence that made it possible to capture them did not figure in the trial. Nevertheless it was the thing that sealed their fate. It recalls the theory of a famous American detective who has often pointed out the fact that, plan and plan, as he may, the criminal invariably leaves some gap in the machination of his scheme, some rift, minute though it may be, some crevice through which the detective may insert the little silver probe of his specialized knowledge, and thus discover the truth.